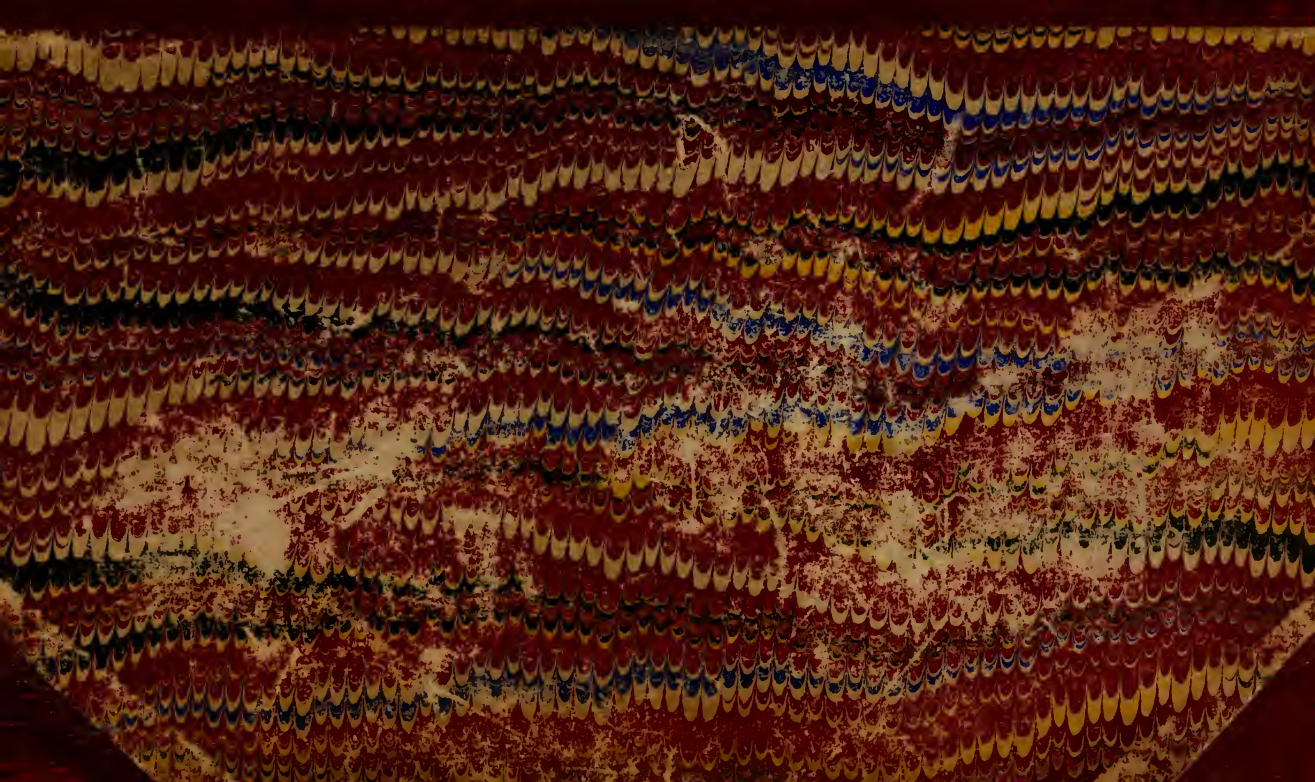

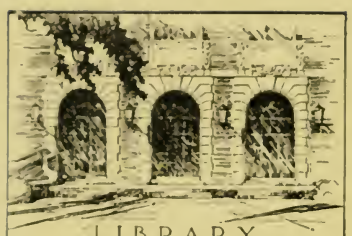

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WE TWO

A NOVEL

BY

EDNA LYALL

AUTHOR OF "DONOVAN," ETC.

"Men are so made as to resent nothing more impatiently than to be treated as criminal for opinions which they deem true."—SPINOZA.

"We two are a multitude."—OVID.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
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1884.

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WE TWO.

CHAPTER I.

AT DEATH'S DOOR.

Sorrow and wrong are pangs of a new birth :
All we who suffer bleed for one another ;
No life may live alone, but all in all ;
We lie within the tomb of our dead selves,
Waiting till One command us to arise.

HON. RODEN NOEL.

KNOWING that Erica would have a very anxious afternoon, Charles Osmond gave up his brief mid-day rest, snatched a hasty lunch at a third-rate restaurant, finished his parish visits sooner than usual, and reached the little house in Guilford Terrace in time to share the worst part of her waiting. He found her hard at work as usual, her table strewn with papers and books of reference. Raeburn had purposely left her

some work to do for him which he knew would fully occupy her; but the mere fact that she knew he had done it on purpose to engross her mind with other matters, entirely prevented her from giving it her full attention. She had never felt more thankful to see Charles Osmond than at that moment.

'When your whole heart and mind are in Hyde Park, how are you to drag them back to what some vindictive old early Father said about the eternity of punishment!' she exclaimed, with a smile which very thinly disguised her consuming anxiety.

They sat down near the open window, Erica taking possession of that side which commanded the view of the entrance of the *cul de sac*. Charles Osmond did not speak for a minute or two, but sat watching her, trying to realise to himself what such anxiety as hers must be. She was evidently determined to keep outwardly calm, not to let her fears gain undue power over her, but she could not conceal the nervous trembling which beset her at every sound of wheels in the quiet square, nor did she know that in her brave eyes there lurked the most visi-

ble manifestation possible of haggard, anxious waiting. She sat with her watch in her hand, the little watch that Eric Haeberlein had given her when she was almost a child, and which, even in the days of their greatest poverty, her father had never allowed her to part with. What strange hours it had often measured for her! Age-long hours of grief, weary days of illness and pain, times of eager expectation, times of sickening anxiety, times of mental conflict, of baffling questions and perplexities. How the hands seemed to creep on this afternoon, at times almost to stand still!

'Now, I suppose if you were in my case, you would pray?' said Erica, raising her eyes to Charles Osmond. 'It must be a relief, but yet, when you come to analyse it, it is most illogical —a fearful waste of time. If there is a God who works by fixed laws, who sees the whole maze of everyone's life beforehand, then the particular time and manner of my father's death must be already appointed, and no prayer of mine that he may come safely through this afternoon's danger can be of the least avail. Besides, if a God could be turned round from His original

purpose by human wills and much speaking, I hardly think He would be worth believing in.'

'You are taking the lowest view of prayer—mere petition; but even that, I think, is set on its right footing as soon as we grasp the true conception of the ideal father. Do you mean to say that, because your father's rules were unwavering and his day's work marked out beforehand, he did not like you to come to him when you were a little child with all your wishes and longings and requests, even though they were sometimes childish and often impossible to gratify? Would he have been better pleased if you had shut up everything in your own heart, and never of your own accord told him anything about your babyish plans and wants?'

'Still, prayer seems to me waste of time,' said Erica.

'What! if it brings you a talk with your Father? If it is a relief to you and a pleasure—because a sign of trust and love—to Him? But in one way I entirely agree with you, unless it is perfectly spontaneous it is not only useless but harmful. Imagine a child forced to talk to its father—and this seems to me the truest

defence of prayer; to the "natural man" it always will seem foolishness, to the "spiritual man"—to one who has recognised the All-Father—it is the absolute necessity of life. And I think by degrees one passes from eager petition for personal and physical good things into the truer and more Christlike spirit of prayer. "These are my fears, these are my wishes, but not my will but Thine be done." Shakspere had got hold of a grand truth, it seems to me, when he said,

"So find we profit by losing of our prayers."'

'And yet your ideal man distinctly said, "Ask and ye shall receive,"' said Erica. 'There are no limitations. For aught we know, some pig-headed fanatic may be at this moment praying that God in His mercy would rid the earth of that most dangerous man, Luke Raeburn; while I might be—of course I am not, but it is conceivable that I might be—praying for his safety. Both of us might claim the same promise, "Ask and ye shall receive."'

'You forget one thing,' said Charles Osmond. 'You would both pray to the Father, and His answer—which you, by the way, might consider

no answer—would be the answer of a father. Do you not think the fanatic would certainly find profit in having his most unbrotherly request disregarded? And the true loss or gain of prayer would surely be in this; the fanatic would, by his un-Christlike request, put himself further from God; you, by your spontaneous and natural avowal of need and recognition of a Supreme loving will, would draw nearer to God. Nor do we yet at all understand the extraordinary influence exerted on others by any steady, earnest concentration of thought; science is but just awakening to the fact that there is an unknown power which we have hitherto never dreamed of. I have great hope that in this direction, as in all others, science may show us the hidden workings of our Father.'

Erica forgot her anxiety for a moment; she was watching Charles Osmond's face with mingled curiosity and perplexity. To speak to one whose belief in the Unseen seemed stronger and more influential than most people's belief in the seen, was always very strange to her, and with her prophet she was almost always con-

scious of this double life (*she* considered it double —a real outer and an imaginary inner). His strong conviction; the every-day language which he used in speaking of those truths which most people, from a mistaken notion of reverence, wrap up in a sort of ecclesiastical phraseology; above all, the carrying out in his life of the idea of universal brotherhood, with so many a mere form of words—all served to impress Erica very deeply. She knew him too well and loved him too truly to pause often, as it were, to analyse his character. Every now and then, however, some new phase was borne in upon her, and some chance word, emphasising the difference between them, forced her from sheer honesty to own how much that was noble seemed in him to be the outcome of faith in Christ.

They went a little more deeply into the prayer question. Then, with the wonder growing on her more and more, Erica suddenly exclaimed,

'It is so wonderful to me that you can believe without logical proof—believe a thing which affects your whole life so immensely, and

yet be unable to demonstrate the very existence of a God!'

'Do you believe your father loves you?' asked Charles Osmond.

'My father? Why, of course.'

'You can't logically prove that his love has any true existence.'

'Why, yes,' exclaimed Erica. 'Not a day passes without some word, look, thought, which would prove it to anyone.. If there is one thing that I am certain of in the whole world, it is that my father loves me. Why, you who know him so well—you must know that! You must have seen that!'

'All his care of you may be mere self-interest,' said Charles Osmond. 'Perhaps he puts on a sort of appearance of affection for you just for the sake of what people would say—not a very likely thing for Mr. Raeburn to consider, I own. Still, you can't demonstrate to me that his love is a reality.'

'But I *know* it is!' cried Erica, vehemently.

'Of course you know, my child; you know in your heart, and our hearts can teach us what no power of intellect, no skill in logic can ever

teach us. You can't logically prove the existence of your father's love, and I can't logically prove the existence of the All-Father; but in our hearts we both of us know. The deepest, most sacred realities are generally those of heart-knowledge, and quite out of the pale of logic.'

Erica did not speak, but sat musing. After all, what *could* be proved with absolute certainty? Why, nothing, except such bare facts as that two and two make four. Was even mathematical proof so absolutely certain! Were they not already beginning to talk of a possible fourth dimension of space when even that might no longer be capable of demonstration.

'Well, setting aside actual proof,' she resumed, after a silence, 'how do you bring it down even to a probability that God is?'

'We must all of us start with a supposition,' said Charles Osmond. 'There must on the one hand either be everlasting matter or everlasting force (whether these be two real existences, or whether matter be only force conditioned), or, on the other hand, you have the alternative of the everlasting "He." You at present base your

belief on the first alternative. I base mine on the last, which, I grant you, is at the outset the most difficult of the two. I find, however, that nine times out of ten the most difficult theory is the truest. Granting the everlasting "He," you must allow self-consciousness, without which there could be no true personality. Then, being the Originator, He must be all powerful, all knowledge-full, and all love-full. We will not quarrel about names; call the Everlasting what you please. "Father" seems to me at once the highest and simplest name.'

'But evil!' broke in Erica, triumphantly; 'if He originates all, He must originate evil as well as good.'

'Certainly,' said Charles Osmond, 'He has expressly told us so. "I form the light and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I, the Lord, do all these things."'

'I recollect now, we spoke of this two or three years ago,' said Erica. 'You said that the highest good was attained by passing through struggles and temptations.'

'Think of it in this way,' said Charles Osmond. 'The Father is educating His chil-

dren; what education was ever brought about without pain? The wise human father does not so much shield his child from small pains, but encourages him to get wisdom from them for the future, tries to teach him endurance and courage. Pain is absolutely necessary as an element in education, probably there is no evolution possible without it. The father may regret it, but, if he is wise, knows that it must be. He suffers twice as much as the child from the infliction of the pain. The All-Father, being at once all-knowing and all-loving, can see the end of the education while we only see it in process, and perhaps exclaim, "What a frightful state of things!" or like your favourite "Stephen Blackpool"—"It's all a muddle!"'

'And the end you consider to be perfection, and eternal union with God. How can you think immortality probable?'

'It is the absolutely necessary outcome of belief in such a God, such a Father as we have spoken of. What! could God have willed that His children whom He really loves should, after a time, fade utterly away? If so, He would be less loving than an average earthly father. If

He did indeed love them, and would fain have had them ever with Him, but could not, then He would not be all-powerful.'

'I see you are a universalist, a great contrast to my Early Father here, who gloats over the delightful prospect of watching from his comfortable heaven the tortures of all unbelievers. But, tell me, what do you think would be our position in your unseen world? I suppose the mere realisation of having given one's life in a mistaken cause would be about the most terrible pain conceivable.'

'I think,' said Charles Osmond, with one of his grave, quiet smiles, 'that death will indeed be your "gate of life," that seeing the light you will come to your true self, and exclaim,—"Who'd have thought it!"'

The every-day language sounded quaint, it made Erica smile; but Charles Osmond continued, with a brightness in his eyes which she was far from understanding,

'And you know there are to be those who shall say, "Lord, when saw we Thee in distress and helped Thee?" They had not recognised Him here, but He recognised them there! They

shared in the "Come, ye blessed of my Father."'

'Well,' said Erica, thoughtfully, 'if any Christianity be true, it must be your loving belief, not the bloodthirsty scheme of the Calvinists. If *that* could by any possibility be true, I should greatly prefer, like Kingsley's dear old "Wulf," to share hell with my own people.'

The words had scarcely left her lips when, with a startled cry, she sprang to her feet and hurried to the door. The next moment Charles Osmond saw Tom pass the window; he was unmistakably the bearer of bad news.

His first panting words were reassuring—'Brian says you are not to be frightened;' but they were evidently the mere repetition of a message. Tom himself was almost hopeless; his wrath and grief became more apparent every minute as he gave an incoherent account of the afternoon's work.

'The brutes, the fiends, had half killed the chieftain, had set on him like so many tigers. Brian and Hazeldine were bringing him home—had sent him on to prepare.'

Erica had listened so far with a colourless face, and hands tightly clasped; but the word 'prepare' seemed to bring new life to her. In an instant she was her strongest self.

'They will never try to take him up that steep, narrow staircase! Quick, Tom! Help me to move this couch into the study.'

The little Irish servant was pressed into the service, too, and sent upstairs to fetch and carry, and in a very few minutes the preparations were complete, and Erica had at hand all the appliances most likely to be needed. Just as all was done, and she was beginning to feel that a minute's pause would be the 'last straw,' Tom heard the sound of wheels in the square, and hurried out. Erica stood in the doorway watching, and presently saw a small crowd of helpers bearing a deathly-looking burden. Whiteness of death—redness of blood! The ground seemed rocking beneath her feet, when a strong hand took hers and drew her into the house.

'Don't be afraid,' said a voice, which she knew to be Brian's, though a black mist would not let her see him. 'He was conscious a minute ago; this is only from the pain of moving. Which room?'

'The study,' she replied, recovering herself. 'Give me something to do, Brian, quickly.'

He saw that in doing lay her safety, and kept her fully employed, so much so, indeed, that from sheer lack of time she was able to stave off the faintness which had threatened to overpower her. After a time her father came to himself, and Erica's face, which had been the last in his mind in full consciousness, was the first which now presented itself to his awakening gaze. He smiled.

'Well, Erica! So, after all, they haven't quite done for me! Nine lives like a cat as I always told you.'

His voice was faint, but with all his wonted energy he raised himself before they could remonstrate. He was far more injured, however, than he knew; with a stifled groan he fell back once more in a swoon, and it was many hours before they were able to restore him.

After that fever set in, and a shadow as of death fell on the house in Guilford Terrace. Doctors came and went; Brian almost lived with his patient; friends—Raeburn had hosts of them—came with help of every description. The

gloomy little alley admitted every day crowds of inquirers who came to the door, read the bulletin, glanced up at the windows, and went away looking graver than when they came.

Erica lost count of time altogether. The past seemed blotted out; the weight of the present was so great that she would not admit any thought of the future, though conscious always of a blank dread which she dared not pause to analyse. Sufficient indeed for her day was the evil thereof! She struggled on somehow with a sort of despairing strength, only once or twice did she even recollect the outside world.

It happened that on the first Wednesday after the Hyde Park meeting some one mentioned the day of the week in her hearing. She was in the sick-room at the time, but at once remembered that her week's work was untouched, that she had not written a line for the *Idol-Breaker*. Every idea seemed to have gone out of her head; for a minute she felt that to save her life she could not write a line. But still she conscientiously struggled to remember what subject had been allotted her, and in the temporary stillness of the first night-watch drew

writing materials towards her, and leant her head on her hands until, almost by an effort of will, she at length recalled the theme for her article.

Of course! it was to be that disgraceful disturbance in the church at Z——. She remembered the whole affair now, it all rose up before her graphically—not a bad subject at all! their party might make a good deal by it. Her article must be bright, descriptive, sarcastic. Yet how was she to write such an article when her heart felt like lead? An involuntary 'I can't' rose to her lips, and she glanced at her father's motionless form, her eyes filling with tears. Then one of his sayings came to her mind, 'No such word as "Can't" in the dictionary,' and she dashed the tears from her eyes, snatched up her pen, and began to write rapidly—almost defiantly. No sooner had she begun than her very exhaustion, the lateness of the hour, and the stress of circumstance came to her aid —she had never before written so brilliantly.

The humour of the scene struck her; little flashes of mirth at the expense of both priest and people, delicate sarcasms, the more searching

from their very refinement, awoke in her brain and were swiftly transcribed. In the middle of one of the most daring sentences Raeburn stirred. Erica's pen was thrown down at once; she was at his side absorbed once more in attending to his wants, forgetful quite of religious controversy, of the *Idol-Breaker,* of anything in fact in the whole world but her father. Not till an hour had passed was she free to finish her writing, but by the time her aunt came to relieve guard at two o'clock the article was finished and Erica stole noiselessly into the next room to put it up.

To her surprise she found that Tom had not gone to bed. He was still toiling away at his desk with a towel round his head; she could almost have smiled at the ludicrous mixture of grief and sleepiness in his face, had not her own heart been so loaded with care and sadness. The post brought in what Tom described as 'bushels' of letters every day, and he was working away at them now with sleepy heroism.

'How tired you look,' said Erica. 'See! I have brought in this for the *Idol.*'

'You've been writing it now? that is good

of you. I was afraid we should have to make up with some wretched padding of Blank's.'

He took the sheets from her and began to read. Laughter is often only one remove from grief, and Tom, though he was sad-hearted enough, could not keep his countenance through Erica's article. First his shoulders began to shake, then he burst into such a paroxysm of noiseless laughter that Erica, fearing that he could not restrain himself, and would be heard in the sick-room, pulled the towel from his forehead over his mouth; then, conquered herself by the absurdity of his appearance, she was obliged to bury her own face in her hands, laughing more and more whenever the incongruousness of the laughter occurred to her. When they had exhausted themselves, the profound depression which had been the real cause of the violent reaction returned with double force. Tom sighed heavily and finished reading the article with the gravest of faces. He was astonished that Erica could have written at such a time an article positively scintillating with mirth.

'How did you manage anything so witty to-night of all nights?' he asked.

'Don't you remember Hans Andersen's clown Punchinello,' said Erica. 'He never laughed and joked so gaily as the night when his love died and his own heart was broken.'

There was a look in her eyes which made Tom reply, quickly,

'Don't write any more just now; the professor has promised us something for next week Don't write any more till—till the chieftain is well.'

After that she wished him good-night rather hastily, crept upstairs to her attic, and threw herself down on her bed. Why had he spoken of the future? Why had his voice hesitated? No, she would not think, she would not!

So the article appeared in that week's *Idol-Breaker*, and thousands and thousands of people laughed over it. It even excited displeased comment from 'the other side,' and in many ways did a great deal of what in Guilford Terrace was considered 'good work.' For Erica herself, it was long before she had time to give it another thought: it was to her only a desperately hard duty which she had succeeded in doing. Nobody ever guessed how much it had cost her.

The weary time dragged on, days and weeks passed by; Raeburn was growing weaker, but clung to life with extraordinary tenacity. And now very bitterly they felt the evils of this voluntarily embraced poverty, for the summer heat was for a few days almost tropical, and the tiny little rooms in the lodging-house were stifling. Brian was very anxious to have the patient moved across to his father's house; but, though Charles Osmond said all he could in favour of the scheme, the other doctors would not consent, thinking the risk of removal too great. And, besides, it would be useless, they maintained,—the atheist was evidently dying. Brian, who was the youngest, could not carry out his wishes in defiance of the others, but he would not deny himself the hope of even yet saving Erica's father. He devised punkahs, became almost nurse and doctor in one, and utterly refused to lose heart. Erica herself was the only other person who shared his hopefulness, or perhaps her feeling could hardly be described by that word; she was not hopeful, but she had so resolutely set herself to live in the present that she had managed altogether to

crowd out the future, and with it the worst fear.

One day, however, it broke upon her suddenly. Some one had left a newspaper in the sick-room; it was weeks since she had seen one, and in a brief interval, while her father slept, or seemed to sleep, she took it up half mechanically. How much it would have interested her a little while ago, how meaningless it all seemed to her now! 'Latest Telegrams,' 'News from the Seat of War,' 'Parliamentary Intelligence,'—a speech by Sir Michael Cunningham, one of her heroes, on a question in which she was interested. She could not read it, all the life seemed gone out of it, to-day the paper was nothing to her but a broad sheet with so many columns of printed matter. But as she was putting it down their own name caught her eye. All at once her benumbed faculties regained their power, her heart began to beat wildly, for there, in clearest print, in short, choppy, unequivocal sentences, was the hideous fear which she had contrived so long to banish.

'Mr. Raeburn is dying. The bulletins have daily been growing less and less hopeful. Yes-

terday Dr. R——, who had been called in, could only confirm the unfavourable opinion of the other doctors. In all probability the days of the great apostle of atheism are numbered. It rests with the Hyde Park rioters, and those who by word and example have incited them, to bear the responsibility of making a martyr of such a man as Mr. Luke Raeburn. Emphatically disclaiming the slightest sympathy with Mr. Raeburn's religious views, we yet——'

But Erica could read no more. Whatever modicum of charity the writer ventured to put forth was lost upon her. The opening sentence danced before her eyes in letters of fire. That morning she met Brian in the passage and drew him into the sitting-room. He saw at once how it was with her.

'Look!' she said, holding the newspaper towards him. 'Is that true? or is it only a sensation trap,—or written for party purposes?'

Her delicate lips were closed with their hardest expression, her eyes only looked grave and questioning. She watched his face as he read, lost her last hope, and, with a look of such

anguish as he had never before seen, drew the paper from him, and caught his hand in hers in wild entreaty.

'Oh, Brian, Brian! is there no hope? Surely you can do something for him. There *must* be hope, he is so strong, so full of life!'

He struggled hard for voice and words to answer her, but the imploring pressure of her hands on his had nearly unnerved him. Already the grief that kills lurked in her eyes,—he knew that if her father died she would not long survive him.

'Don't say what is untrue!' she continued. 'Don't let me drive you into telling a lie,—but only tell me if there is indeed no hope—no chance.'

'It may be,' said Brian. 'You must not expect, for those far wiser than I say it cannot be. But I hope—yes, I still hope.'

On that crumb of comfort she lived; but it was a weary day, and for the first time she noticed that her father, who was free from fever, followed her everywhere with his eyes. She knew intuitively that he thought himself dying.

Towards evening she was sitting beside him, slowly drawing her fingers through his thick masses of snow-white hair in the way he liked best, when he looked suddenly right into her eyes with his own strangely similar ones, deep, earnest eyes, full now of a sort of dumb yearning.

'Little son Eric,' he said, faintly, 'you will go on with the work I am leaving.'

'Yes, father,' she replied, firmly, though her heart felt as if it would break.

'A harmful delusion,' he murmured, half to himself, 'taking up our best men! swallowing up the money of the people! What's that singing, Erica?'

'It is the children in the hospital,' she replied. 'I'll shut the window if they disturb you, father.'

'No,' he said. 'One can tolerate the delusion for them if it makes their pain more bearable. Poor bairns! poor bairns! Pain is an odd mystery.'

He drew down her hand and held it in his, seeming to listen to the singing, which floated in clearly through the open window at right angles with the back windows of the hospital.

Neither of them knew what the hymn was, but the refrain which came after every verse as if even the tinies were joining in it was perfectly audible to Luke Raeburn and his daughter.

> 'Through life's long day, and death's dark night,
> Oh, gentle Jesus, be our Light.'

Erica's breath came in gasps. To be reminded then that life was long, and that death was dark!

She thought she had never prayed, she never had consciously prayed, but her whole life for the past three years had been an unspoken prayer. Never was there a more true desire entirely unexpressed, than the desire which now seemed to possess her whole being. The darkness would soon hide for ever the being she most loved. Oh, if she could but honestly think that He who called Himself the Light of the world was indeed still living, still ready to help!

But to allow her distress to gain the mastery of her would certainly disturb and grieve her father. With a great effort she stifled the sobs which would rise in her throat, and waited in rigid stillness. When the last notes of the hymn had died away into silence, she turned to look at her father. He had fallen asleep.

CHAPTER II.

ANSWERED OR UNANSWERED?

'Glory to God—to God!' he saith,
'Knowledge by suffering entereth,
And life is perfected by death.'

E. B. BROWNING.

'MR. RAEBURN is curiously like the celebrated dog of nursery lore, who appertained to the ancient and far-famed Mother Hubbard. All the doctors gave him up, all the Secularists prepared mourning garments, the printers were meditating black borders for the *Idol-Breaker*, the relative merits of burial and cremation were already in discussion, when the dog—we beg pardon—the leader of atheism, came to life again.

"She went to the joiner's to buy him a coffin,
But when she came back the dog was laughing."

"History," as a great man was fond of remarking, "repeats itself."'

Raeburn laughed heartily over the accounts of his recovery in the comic papers. No one better appreciated the very clever representation of himself as a huge bull-dog starting up into life while Britannia in widow's weeds brought in a parish coffin. Erica would hardly look at the thing, she had suffered too much to be able to endure any jokes on the subject, and she felt hurt and angry that what had given her such anguish should be turned into a foolish jest.

At length, after many weeks of wearing anxiety, she was able to breathe freely once more, for her father steadily regained his strength. The devotion of her whole time and strength and thought to another had done wonders for her, her character had strangely deepened and mellowed. But no sooner was she free to begin her ordinary life than new perplexities beset her on every side.

During her own long illness she had of course been debarred from attending any lectures or meetings whatever. In the years following,

before she had quite regained her strength, she had generally gone to hear her father, but had never become again a regular attendant at the lecture-hall. Now that she was quite well, however, there was nothing to prevent her attending as many lectures as she pleased, and, naturally, her position as Luke Raeburn's daughter made her presence desirable. So it came to pass one Sunday evening in July that she happened to be present at a lecture given by a Mr. Masterman.

He was a man whom they knew intimately. Erica liked him sufficiently well in private life, and he had been remarkably kind and helpful at the time of her father's illness. It was some years, however, since she had heard him lecture, and this evening, by the virulence of his attack on the character of Christ, he revealed to her how much her ground had shifted since she had last heard him. It was not that he was an opponent of existing Christianity—her father was that, she herself was that, and felt bound to be as long as she considered it a lie—but Mr. Masterman's attack seemed to her grossly unfair, almost wilfully inaccurate, and, in addition,

his sarcasms and pleasantries seemed to her odiously vulgar. He was answered by a most miserable representative of Christianity, who made a foolish, weak, blustering speech, and tried to pay the atheist back in his own coin. Erica felt wretched. She longed to get up and speak herself, longing flatly to contradict the champion of her own cause; then grew frightened at the strength of her feelings. Could this be mere love of fair play and justice? Was her feeling merely that of a barrister who could argue as well on one side as the other? And yet her displeasure in itself proved little or nothing. Would not Charles Osmond be displeased and indignant if he heard her father unjustly spoken of? Yes, but then Luke Raeburn was a living man, and Christ—was she even sure that he had ever lived? Well, yes, sure of that, but of how much more?

When the assembly broke up, her mind was in a miserable chaos of doubt.

It was one of those delicious summer evenings when even in East London the skies are mellow and the air sweet and cool.

'Oh, Tom, let us walk home!' she exclaimed,

longing for change of scene and exercise.

'All right,' he replied, 'I'll take you a short cut, if you don't mind a few back slums to begin with.'

Now Erica was familiar enough with the sight of poverty and squalor; she had not lived at the West End, where you may entirely forget the existence of the poor. The knowledge of evil had come to her of necessity much earlier than to most girls, and to-night, as Tom took her through a succession of narrow streets and dirty courts, misery, and vice, and hopeless degradation met her on every side. Swarms of filthy little children wrangled and fought in the gutters, drunken women shouted foul language at one another—everywhere was wickedness—everywhere want.

Her heart felt as if it would break. What was to reach these poor, miserable fellow-creatures of hers? Who was to raise them out of their horrible plight? The coarse distortion and the narrow contraction of Christ's teaching which she had just heard, offered no remedy for this evil. Nor could she think that secularism would reach these. To understand secularism

you need a fair share of intellect,—what intellect would these poor creatures have? Why, you might talk for ever of the 'good of humanity,' and 'the duty of promoting the general good,' and they would not so much as grasp the idea of what 'good' was—they would sink back to their animal-like state.

Instinctively her thoughts turned to the Radical Reformer who, eighteen hundred years ago, had lived among people just as wicked, just as wretched. How had He worked? What had He done? All through His words and actions had sounded the one key-note, 'Your Father.' Always He had led them to look up to a perfect Being who loved them, who was present with them.

Was it possible that if Christians had indeed followed their Leader and not obscured His teaching with hideous accretions of doctrine which He had assuredly never taught—was it possible that the Christ-gospel in its original simplicity would indeed be the remedy for all evil?

They were coming into broader thoroughfares now. A wailing child's voice fell on her

ear. A small crowd of disreputable idlers were hanging round the closed doors of a public house, waiting eagerly for the opening which would take place at the close of service time. The wailing child's voice grew more and more piteous, Erica saw that it came from a poor little half-clad creature of three years old who was clinging to the skirts of a miserable-looking woman with a shawl thrown over her head. Just as she drew near, the woman, with a fearful oath, tried to shake herself free of the child; then, with up-lifted arm, was about to deal it a heavy blow when Erica caught her hand as it descended, and held it fast in both her hands.

'Don't hurt him,' she said, 'please, don't hurt him.'

She looked into the prematurely wrinkled face, into the half dim eyes; she held the hand fast with a pressure not of force but of entreaty. Then they passed on, the bystanders shouting out the derisive chorus of 'Come to Jesus!' with which London roughs delight in mocking any passenger whom they suspect of religious tendencies. In all her sadness Erica

could not help smiling to herself. That she, an atheist, Luke Raeburn's daughter, should be hooted at as a follower of Jesus!

In the meantime the woman she had spoken to stood still staring after her. If an angel had suddenly appeared to her, she could not have been more startled. A human hand had given her coarse, guilty, trembling hand such a living pressure as it had never before received; a pure, loving face had looked at her; a voice, which was trembling with earnestness and full of the pathos of restrained tears, had pleaded with her for her own child. The woman's dormant motherhood sprang into life. Yes, he was her own child after all. She did not really want to hurt him, but a sort of demon was inside her, the demon of drink, and sometimes it made her almost mad. She looked down now with love-cleared eyes at the little crying child who still clung to her ragged skirt. She stooped and picked him up. and wrapped a bit of her shawl round him. Presently, after a fearful struggle, she turned away from the public-house and carried the child home to bed.

The jeering chorus was soon checked, for

the shutters were taken down, and the doors thrown wide, and light, and cheerfulness, and shelter, and the drink they were all craving for were temptingly displayed to draw in the waiting idlers.

But the woman had gone home, and one rather surly-looking man still leant against the wall looking up the street where Tom and Erica had disappeared.

'Blowed if that ain't a bit of pluck!' he said to himself, and therewith fell into a reverie.

Tom talked of temperance work, about which he was very eager, all the way to Guilford Terrace. Erica, on reaching home, went at once to her father's room. She found him propped up with pillows in his arm-chair; he was still only well enough to attempt the lightest of light literature, and was looking at some old volumes of *Punch* which the Osmonds had sent across.

'You look tired, Eric!' he exclaimed. 'Was there a good attendance?'

'Very,' she replied, but so much less brightly than usual that Raeburn at once divined that something had annoyed her.

'Was Mr. Masterman dull?'

'Not dull,' she replied, hesitatingly. Then, with more than her usual vehemence, 'Father, I can't endure him! I wish we didn't have such men on our side! He is so flippant, so vulgar!'

'Of course he never was a model of refinement,' said Raeburn, 'but he is effective—very effective. It is impossible that you should like his style; he is, compared with you, what a theatrical poster is to a delicate *tête de Greuze*. How did he specially offend you to-night?'

'It was all hateful from the very beginning,' said Erica. 'And sprinkled all through with doubtful jests which of course pleased the people. One despicable one about the Entry into Jerusalem, which I believe he must have got from Strauss. I'm sure Strauss quotes it.'

'You see what displeases an educated mind, wins a rough, uncultured one. We may not altogether like it, but we must put up with it. We need our Moodys and Sankeys as well as the Christians.'

'But, father, he seems to me so unfair.'

Raeburn looked grave.

'My dear,' he said, after a minute's thought, 'you are not in the least bound to go to hear Mr. Masterman again unless you like. But remember this, little son Eric, we are only a struggling minority, and let me quote to you one of our Scottish proverbs—"Hawks shouldna pick out hawks' een." You are still a hawk, are you not?'

'Of course,' she said, earnestly.

'Well, then, be leal to your brother hawks.'

A cloud of perplexed thought stole over Erica's face. Raeburn noted it and did his best to divert her attention.

'Come,' he said, 'let us have a chapter of Mark Twain to enliven us.'

But even Mark Twain was inadequate to check the thought-struggle which had begun in Erica's brain. Desperate earnestness would not be conquered even by the most delightful of all humorous fiction.

During the next few days this thought-struggle raged. So great was Erica's fear of being biassed either one way or the other that she would not even hint at her perplexity either to her father or to Charles Osmond. And now

the actual thoroughness of her character seemed a hindrance.

She had imagination, quick perception of the true and beautiful, and an immense amount of steady common-sense. At the same time she was almost as keen and quite as slow of conviction as her father. Honestly dreading to allow her poetic faculty due play, she kept her imagination rigidly within the narrowest bounds. She was thus honestly handicapped in the race; the honesty was, however, a little mistaken and onesided, for not the most vivid imagination could be considered as a set-off to the great, the incalculable counter-influence of her whole education and surroundings. How she got through that black struggle was sometimes a mystery to her. At last one evening, when the load had grown intolerable, she shut herself into her own room, and, forgetful of all her logical arguments, spoke to the unknown God. Her hopelessness, her desperation, drove her as a last resource to cry to the possibly Existent.

She stood by the open window of her little room, with her arms on the window-sill, looking

out into the summer night, just as years before she had stood when making up her mind to exile and sacrifice. Then the wintry heavens had been blacker and the stars brighter, now both sky and stars were dimmer because more light. Over the roofs of the Guilford Square houses she could see Charles' Wain and the Pole star, but only faintly.

'God!' she cried, 'I have no reason to think that Thou art, except that there is such fearful need of Thee. I can see no single proof in the world that Thou art here. But if what Christ said was true, then Thou must care that I should know Thee for I must be Thy child. Oh, God, if Thou art—oh, Father, if Thou art—help us to know Thee! show us what is true!'

She waited and waited, hoping for some sort of answer, some thought, some conviction. But she found, as many have found before her, that 'the heavens were as brass.'

'Of course it was no use!' she exclaimed, impatiently, yet with a blankness of disappointment which in itself proved the reality of her expectations.

Just then she heard Tom's voice at the foot

of the stairs calling her; it seemed like the seal to her impatient 'of course.' There was no Unseen, no Eternal—of course not! But there was a busy everyday life to be lived.

'All right,' she returned, impatiently, to Tom's repeated calls; 'don't make such a noise or you'll disturb father!'

'He is wide awake,' said Tom, 'and talking to the Professor. Just look here, I couldn't help fetching you down—did you ever see such a speech in your life! A regular brick he must be!'

He held an evening paper in his hand. Erica remembered that the debate was to be on a question affecting all freethinkers. During the discussion of this, some one had introduced a reference to the Hyde Park meeting and to Mr. Raeburn, and had been careful not to lose the opportunity of making a spiteful and misleading remark about the apostle of atheism. Tom hurried her through this, however, to the speech that followed it.

'Wait a minute,' she said. 'Who is Mr. Farrant? I never heard of him before.'

'Member for Greyshot, elected last spring,

don't you remember? One of the bye-elections. Licked the Tories all to fits. This is his maiden speech, and that makes it all the more plucky of him to take up the cudgels in our defence. Here! let me read it to you.'

With the force of one who is fired with a new and hearty admiration, he read the report. The speech was undoubtedly a fine one; it was a grand protest against intolerance, a plea for justice. The speaker had not hesitated for an instant to raise his voice in behalf of a very unpopular cause, and his generous words, even when read through the medium of an indifferent newspaper report, awoke a strange thrill in Erica's heart. The utter disregard of self, the nobility of the whole speech struck her immensely. The man who had dared to stand up for the first time in Parliament and speak thus, must be one in a thousand. Presently came the most daring and disinterested touch of all.

'The honourable member for Rilchester made what I cannot but regard as a most misleading and unnecessary remark with reference to the recent occurrence in Hyde Park, and to Mr. Raeburn. I listened to it with pain, for, if there

can be degrees in the absolute evil of injustice and lack of charity, it seems to me that the highest degree is reached in that uncharitableness which tries to blacken the character of an opponent. Since the subject has been introduced, the House will, I hope, bear with me if for the sake of justice I for a moment allude to a personal matter. Some years ago I myself was an atheist, and I can only say that, speaking now from the directly opposite standpoint, I can still look back and thank Mr. Raeburn most heartily for the good service he did me. He was the first man who ever showed me, by words and example combined, that life is only noble when lived for the race. The statement made by the honourable member for Rilchester seems to me as incorrect as it was uncalled for. Surely this assembly will best prove its high character not by loud religious protestations, not by supporting a narrow, Pharisaical measure, but by impartiality, by perfect justice, by the manifestation in deed and word of that broad-hearted charity, that universal brotherliness, which alone deserves the name of Christianity.'

The manifestation of the speaker's generosity

and universal brotherliness came like a light to Erica's darkness. It did not end her struggle, but it did end her despair. A faint, indefinable hope rose in her heart.

Mr. Farrant's maiden speech made a considerable stir; it met with some praise and much blame. Erica learnt from one of the papers that he was Mr. Donovan Farrant, and at once felt convinced that he was the 'Donovan' whom both Charles Osmond and Brian had mentioned to her. She seemed to know a good deal about him. Probably they had never told her his surname, because they knew that some day he would be a public character. With instinctive delicacy she refrained from making any reference to his speech, or any inquiry as to his identity with the 'Donovan' of whose inner life she had heard. Very soon after that, too, she went down to the seaside with her father, and when they came back to town the Osmonds had gone abroad, so it was not until the autumn that they again met.

Her stay at Codrington wonderfully refreshed her; it was the first time in her life that she had taken a thorough holiday, with change of

scene and restful idleness to complete it. The time was outwardly uneventful enough, but her father grew strong in body and she grew strong in mind.

One absurd little incident she often laughed over afterwards. It happened that in the *On-looker* there was a quotation from some unnamed mediæval writer; she and her father had a discussion as to whom it could be, Raeburn maintaining that it was Thomas à Kempis. Wishing to verify it, Erica went to a booksellers' and asked for the 'Imitation of Christ.' A rather prim-looking dame presided behind the counter.

'We haven't that book, miss,' she said, 'it's quite out of fashion now.'

'I agree with you,' said Erica, greatly amused. 'It must be quite out of fashion, for I scarcely know half-a-dozen people who practise it.'

However, a second shop appeared to think differently, for it had Thomas à Kempis in every conceivable size, shape, and binding. Erica bought a little sixpenny copy and went back to the beach, where she made her father laugh over her story.

They verified the quotation, and by-and-by Erica began to read the book. On the very first page she came to words which made her pause and relapse into a deep reverie.

'But he who would fully and feelingly understand the words of Christ, must study to make his whole life conformable to that of Christ.'

The thought linked itself in her mind with some words of John Stuart Mill's which she had heard quoted till she was almost weary of them.

'Nor even now would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life.'

While she was still musing, a sound of piteous crying attracted her notice. Looking up she saw a tiny child wandering along the beach, trailing a wooden spade after and her sobbing as if her heart would break. In a moment Erica was beside her, coaxing and consoling, but at last, finding it impossible to draw forth an intelligible word from the sobs and tears, she

took the little thing in her arms and carried her to her father. Raeburn was a great child-lover, and had a habit of carrying goodies in his pocket, much to the satisfaction of all the children with whom he was brought in contact. He produced a bit of butter-scotch, which restored the small maiden's serenity for a minute.

'She must have lost her way,' he said, glancing from the lovely little tear-stained face to the thinly-shod feet and ungloved hands of the little one. The butter-scotch had won her heart. Presently she volunteered a remark,

'Dolly putted on her own hat. Dolly wanted to dig all alone. Dolly lan away.'

'Where is your home?' asked Erica.

'Me don't know! me don't know!' cried Dolly, bursting into tears again, and hiding her face on Raeburn's coat. 'Father! father, Dolly wants father.'

'We will come and look for him,' said Erica, 'but you must stop crying, and you know your father will be sure to come and look for you.'

At this the little one checked her tears, and

looked up as if expecting to see him close by.

'He isn't there,' she said, piteously.

'Come and let us look for him,' said Erica.

Dolly jumped up, thrust her little hand into Erica's, and toiled up the steep beach. They had reached the road, and Erica paused for a moment, wondering which direction they had better take, when a voice behind her made her start.

'Why, Dorothy—little one—we've been hunting for you everywhere!'

Dolly let go Erica's hand, and with a glad cry rushed into the arms of a tall, dark, rather foreign-looking man, who caught her up and held her closely.

He turned to Erica and thanked her very warmly for her help. Erica thought his face the noblest she had ever seen.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE MUSEUM.

Methought I heard one calling, 'Child,'
And I replied, 'My Lord!'
GEORGE HERBERT.

A FAVOURITE pastime with country children is to watch the gradual growth of the acorn into the oak-tree. They will suspend the acorn in a glass of water and watch the slow progress during long months. First one tiny white thread is put forth, then another, until at length the glass is almost filled with a tangle of white fibres, a sturdy little stem raises itself up, and the baby tree, if it is to live, must be at once transplanted into good soil. The process may be botanically interesting, but there is something a little sickly about it, too—there is a feeling that, after all, the acorn would have done

better in its natural ground hidden away in darkness.

And, if we have this feeling with regard to vegetable growth, how much more with regard to spiritual growth! To attempt to set up the gradually awakening spirit in an apparatus where it might be the observed of all observers would be at once repulsive and presumptuous. Happily, it is impossible. We may trace influences and suggestions, just as we may note the rain or drought, the heat or cold that affect vegetable growth, but the actual birth is ever hidden.

To attempt even to shadow forth Erica's growth during the next year would be worse than presumptuous. As to her outward life it was not greatly changed, only intensified. October always began their busiest six months. There was the night school at which she was able to work again indefatigably. There were lectures to be attended. Above all, there was an ever increasing amount of work to be done for her father. In all the positive and constructive side of Secularism, in all the efforts made by it to better humanity, she took an enthusiastic share. Naturally she did not see so

much of Charles Osmond now that she was strong again. In the press of business, in the hard, everyday life there was little time for discussion. They met frequently, but never for one of their long *tête-à-têtes*. Perhaps Erica purposely avoided them. She was strangely different now from the little impetuous girl who had come to his study years ago, trembling with anger at the Lady Superintendent's insult. Insults had since then, alas, become so familiar to her, that she had acquired a sort of patient dignity of endurance, infinitely sad to watch in such a young girl.

One morning in early June, just a year after the memorable Hyde Park meeting, Charles Osmond happened to be returning from the death-bed of one of his parishioners when, at the corner of Guilford Square, he met Erica. It might have been in part the contrast with the sad and painful scene he had just quitted, but he thought she had never before looked so beautiful. Her face seemed to have taken to itself the freshness and the glow of the summer morning.

'You are early abroad,' he said, feeling older

and greyer and more tired than ever as he paused to speak to her.

'I am off to the museum to read,' she said, 'I like to get there by nine, then you don't have to wait such an age for your books; I can't bear waiting.'

'What are you at work upon now?'

'Oh, to-day for the last time I am going to hunt up particulars about Livingstone. Hazeldine was very anxious that a series of papers on his life should be written for our people. What a grand fellow he was!'

'I heard a characteristic anecdote of him the other day,' said Charles Osmond. 'He was walking beside one of the African lakes which he had discovered, when suddenly there dawned on him a new meaning to long familiar words. "The blood of Christ!" he exclaimed. "That must be Charity! The blood of Christ—that must be Charity!" A beautiful thought, too seldom practically taught.'

Erica looked grave.

'Characteristic, certainly, of his broad-heartedness, but I don't think that anecdote will do for readers of the *Idol-Breaker*.' Then, looking

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up at Charles Osmond, she added, in a rather lower tone, 'Do you know, I had no idea when I began what a difficult task I had got. I thought in such an active life as that there would be little difficulty in keeping the religious part away from the secular, but it is wonderful how Livingstone contrives to mix them up.'

'You see, if Christianity be true, it must, as you say, "mix up" with everything. There should be no rigid distinction between secular and religious,' said Charles Osmond.

'If it is true,' said Erica, suddenly, and with seeming irrelevance, 'then sooner or later we must learn it to be so. Truth *must* win in the end. But it is worse to wait for perfect certainty than for books at the museum!' she added, laughing. 'It is five minutes to nine—I shall be late.'

Charles Osmond walked home thoughtfully; the meeting had somehow cheered him.

'Absolute conviction that truth must out—that truth must make itself perceptible! I've not often come across a more beautiful faith than that. Yes, little Undine, right you are! "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall

make you free." Here or there, here or there—

"All things come round to him who will but wait."

There's one for yourself, Charles Osmond! None of your hurrying and meddling now, old man! you've just got to leave it to your betters.'

Soliloquising after this fashion he reached home, and was not sorry to find his breakfast awaiting him, for he had been up the greater part of the night.

The great domed library of the British Museum had become very homelike to Erica, it was her ideal of comfort; she went there whenever she wanted quiet, for in the small and crowded lodgings she could never be secure from interruptions, and interruptions resulted in bad work. There was something, too, in the atmosphere of the museum which seemed to help her. She liked the perfect stillness, she liked the presence of all the books. Above all, too, she liked the consciousness of possession. There was no narrow exclusiveness about this place, no one could look askance at her here. The place belonged to the people, and

therefore belonged to her; she—heretic and atheist as she was—had as much share in the ownership as the highest in the land. She had her own peculiar nook over by the encyclopedias, and, being always an early comer, seldom failed to secure her own particular chair and desk.

On this morning she took her place, as she had done hundreds of times before, and was soon hard at work. She was finishing her last paper on Livingstone when a book she had ordered was deposited on her desk by one of the noiseless attendants. She wanted it to verify one or two dates, and she half thought she would try to hunt up Charles Osmond's anecdote. In order to write her series of papers, she had been obliged to study the character of the great explorer pretty thoroughly. She had always been able to see the nobility even of those differing most widely from herself in point of creed, and the great beauty of Livingstone's character had impressed her very much. To-day she happened to open on an entry in his journal which seemed particularly characteristic of the man. He was in great danger from the hostile tribes at the union of the Zam-

besi and Loangwa, and there was something about his spontaneous utterance which appealed very strongly to Erica.

'Felt much turmoil of spirit in view of having all my plans for the welfare of this great region and teeming population knocked on the head by savages to-morrow. But I read that Jesus came and said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, and lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." It is the word of a gentleman of the most sacred and strictest honour, and there's an end on't. I will not cross furtively by night as I intended. . . . Nay, verily, I shall take observations for latitude and longitude to-night, though they may be the last.'

The courage, the daring, the perseverance, the intense faith of the man shone out in these few sentences. Was it indeed a delusion, such practical faith as that?

Blackness of darkness seemed to hem her in. She struggled through it once more by the one gleam of certainty which had come to her in the past year. Truth must be self-revealing.

Sooner or later, if she were honest, if she did not shut her mind deliberately up with the assurance,—'You have thought out these matters fully and fairly; enough! let us now rest content,'—if she were indeed a true 'Free-thinker,' she *must* know! And even as that conviction returned to her the words, half-quaint, half-pathetic, came to her mind,—'It is the word of a gentleman of the most sacred and strictest honour, and there's an end on't.'

Yes, there would 'be an end on't,' if she could feel sure that he, too, was not deluded!

She turned over the pages of the book, and towards the end found a copy of the inscription on Livingstone's tomb. Her eye fell on the words, 'And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice.'

Somehow the mention of the lost sheep brought to her mind the little lost child on the beach at Codrington—Dolly, who had 'putted on' her own hat, who had wanted to be independent, and to dig by herself. She had run away from home, and could not find the way back. What a steep climb they had had up

the beach!—how the little thing's tiny feet had slipped and stumbled over the stones, and, just when they were most perplexed, the father had found them!

Exactly how it all came to her, Erica never knew, nor could she ever put into words the story of the next few moments. When 'God's great sunrise' finds us out, we have need of something higher than human speech—there *are* no words for it. At the utmost she could only say that it was like coming out of the twilight, that it seemed as if she were immersed in a great wave of all-pervading light.

All in a moment the Christ who had been to her merely a noble character of ancient history seemed to become to her the most real and living of all living realities. Even her own existence seemed to fade into a vague and misty shadow in comparison with the intensity of this new consciousness—this conviction of His being which surrounded her—which she knew, indeed, to be 'way, and truth, and life.' 'They shall hear My voice.' In the silence of waiting, in the faithfulness of honest searching, Erica for the first time in her life heard it.

Yes, she had been right—truth was self-revealing. A few minutes ago these words had been to her an unfulfilled, a vain promise—the speaker, broad-hearted and loving as he was, had doubtless been deluded. But now the voice spoke to her, called her by name, told her what she wanted.

'Dolly' became to her a parable of life. She had been like that little child; for years and years she had been toiling up over rough stones and slippery pebbles, but at last she had heard the voice. Was this the coming to the Father?

That which often appears sudden and unaccountable is, if we did but know it, a slow, beautiful evolution. It was now very nearly seven years since the autumn afternoon when the man, 'too nice to be a clergyman,' and 'not a bit like a Christian,' had come to Erica's home, had shown her that at least one of them practised the universal brotherliness which almost all preached. It was nearly seven years since words of absolute conviction, words of love and power, had first sounded forth from Christian lips in her father's lecture-hall, and

had awakened in her mind that miserably uncomfortable question—'supposing Christianity should be true?'

All the most beautiful influences are quiet; only the destructive agencies, the stormy wind, the heavy rain and hail, are noisy. Love of the deepest sort is wordless, the sunshine steals down silently, the dew falls noiselessly, and the communion of spirit with spirit is calmer and quieter than anything else in the world—quiet as the spontaneous turning of the sunflower to the sun when the heavy clouds have passed away, and the light and warmth reveal themselves. The subdued rustle of leaves, the hushed footsteps sounded as usual in the great library, but Erica was beyond the perception of either place or time.

Presently she was recalled by the arrival of another student, who took the chair next to hers—a little deformed man, with a face which looked prematurely old, and sad, restless eyes. A few hours before she would have regarded him with a sort of shuddering compassion; now with the compassion there came to her the thought of compensation which even here and

now might make the poor fellow happy. Was he not immortal? Might he not here and now learn what she had just learnt, gain that unspeakable joy? and might not the knowledge go on growing and increasing for ever? She took up her pen once more, verified the dates, rolled up her manuscript, and, with one look at Livingstone's journal, returned it to the clerk and left the library.

It was like coming into a new world; even dingy Bloomsbury seemed beautiful. Her face was so bright, so like the face of a happy child, that more than one passer-by was startled by it, lifted for a moment from sordid cares into a purer atmosphere. She felt a longing to speak to some one who would understand her new happiness. She had reached Guilford Square, and looked doubtfully across to the Osmonds' house. They would understand! But no—she must tell her father first. And then, with a fearful pang, she realised what her new conviction meant. It meant bringing the sword into her father's house; it meant grieving him with a life-long grief; it meant leaving the persecuted minority, and going over to the

triumphant majority; it meant unmitigated pain to all those she loved best.

Erica had had her full share of pain, but never had she known anything so agonising as that moment's sharp revulsion. Mechanically she walked on until she reached home; nobody was in. She looked into the little sitting-room, but only Friskarina sat purring on the rug. The table was strewn with the Saturday papers; the mid-day post had just come. She turned over the letters, and found one for herself in her father's hand-writing. It was the one thing needed to complete the realisation of her pain. She snatched it up with a stifled sob, ran upstairs to her room, and threw herself down on the bed in a silent agony.

A new joy had come to her which her father could not share; a joy which he would call a delusion, which he spent great part of his life in combating. To tell him that she was convinced of the truth of Christianity—why, it would almost break his heart!

And yet she must inflict this terrible pain. Her nature was far too noble to have dreamed for a single instant of temporizing, of keeping

her thoughts to herself. A Raeburn was not likely to fail either in courage or in honesty; but, with her courage and honesty, Erica had the violin-like sensitiveness of nature which Eric Haeberlein had noticed even in her childhood. She saw in the future all the pain she must bring to her father, intensified by her own sensitiveness. She knew so well what her feelings would have been but a short time ago, if anyone she greatly loved had 'fallen back' into Christianity. How could she tell him? How *could* she!

Yet it was a thing which must be done. Should she write to him? No, the letter might reach him when he was tired and worried—yet, to speak would be more painful.

She got up, and went to the window, and let the summer wind blow on her heated forehead. The world had seemed to her just before one glorious presence-chamber, full of sunshine and rejoicing. But already the shadow of a lifelong pain had fallen on her heart. A revealed Christ meant also a revealed cross, and a right heavy one.

It was only by degrees that she grew strong

again, and Livingstone's text came back to her once more, 'I am with you alway.'

By and by, she opened her father's letter. It ran as follows:—

'I have just remembered that Monday will be your birthday. Let us spend it together, little son Eric! A few days at Codrington would do us both good, and I have a tolerably leisure week. If you can come down on Saturday afternoon, so much the better. I will meet you there, if you will telegraph reply as soon as you get this. I have three lectures at Helmstone on Sunday, but you will probably prefer a quiet day by the sea. Bring me Westcott's new book, and you might put in the chisel and hammer. We will do a little geologising for the professor, if we have time. Meeting here last night a great success.

'Your loving father,

'LUKE RAEBURN.'

'He is only thinking how he can give me pleasure!' sighed Erica. 'And I have nothing to give him but pain!'

She went at once, however, for the 'Bradshaw,' and looked out the afternoon trains to Codrington.

CHAPTER IV.

STORM.

And seems she mid deep silence to a strain
To listen, which the soul alone can know,
Saying, 'Fear nought, for Jesus came on earth,
Jesus of endless joys the wide, deep sea,
To ease each heavy load of mortal birth.
His waters ever clearest, sweetest be
To him who in a lonely bark drifts forth
On His great deeps of goodness trustfully.'

From Vittoria Colonna.

CODRINGTON was one of the very few seaside places within fairly easy reach of London which had not been vulgarised into an ordinary watering-place. It was a primitive little place, with one good, old-established hotel, and a limited number of villas and lodging-houses, which only served as a sort of ornamental fringe to the picturesque little fishing-town.

The fact was, that it was just midway between two large and deservedly popular resorts, and so it had been overlooked, and to the regret of the thrifty inhabitants, and the satisfaction of the visitors who came there for quiet, its peaceful streets and its stony beach were never invaded by excursionists. No cockneys came down for the Sunday to eat shrimps; the shrimps were sent away by train to the more favoured watering-places, and the Codrington shopkeepers shook their heads, and gave up expecting to make a fortune in such a conservative little place. Erica said it reminded her of the dormouse in 'Alice in Wonderland,' tyrannised over by the hatter on one side and the March hare on the other, and eventually put head foremost into the teapot. Certainly Helmstone on the east and Westport on the west had managed to eclipse it altogether, and its peaceful sleepiness made the dormouse comparison by no means inapt.

It all looked wonderfully unchanged as she walked from the station that summer afternoon with her father. The square, grey tower of St. Oswald's Church, the little, winding, irregular

streets, the very shop-windows seemed quite unaltered, while at every turn familiar faces came into sight. The shrewd old sailor with the telescope, the prim old lady at the bookseller's, who had pronounced the 'Imitation of Christ' to be quite out of fashion, the sturdy milkman, with white smock frock, and bright pails fastened to a wooden yoke, and the coast-guardsman, who was always whistling 'Tom Bowling.'

The sea was as calm as a mill-pond; Raeburn suggested an hour or two on the water, and Erica, who was fond of boating, gladly assented. She had made up her mind not to speak to her father that evening; he had a very hard day's work before him on the Sunday; they must have these few hours in peace. She did not in the least dread any subject coming up which might put her into difficulty, for, on the rare days when her father allowed himself any recreation, he entirely banished all controversial topics from his mind. He asked no single question relating to the work or to business of any kind, but gave himself up to the enjoyment of a much needed rest and relaxation. He seemed in excellent spirits, and Erica herself

would have been rapturously happy if she had not been haunted by the thought of the pain that awaited him. She knew that this was the last evening she and her father should ever spend together in the old perfect confidence; division —the most painful of all divisions—lay before them.

The next day she was left to herself. She would not go to the old grey-towered church; though as an atheist she had gone to one or two churches to look and listen, she felt that she could not honourably go as a worshipper till she had spoken to her father. So she wandered about on the shore, and in the restful quiet learnt more, and grew stronger, and conquered the dread of the morrow. She did not see her father again that day, for he could not get back from Helmstone till a late train, and she had promised not to sit up for him.

The morning of her twenty-third birthday was bright and sunshiny; she had slept well, but awoke with the oppressive consciousness that a terribly hard duty lay before her. When she came down there was a serious look in her eyes which did not escape Raeburn's keen ob-

servation. He was down before her, and had been out already, for he had managed somehow to procure a lovely handful of red and white roses and mignonette.

'All good wishes for your birthday, and "sweets to the sweet," as some one remarked on a more funereal occasion,' he said, stooping to kiss her. 'Dear little son Eric, it is very jolly to have you to myself for once! No disrespect to Aunt Jean and old Tom, but two is company!'

'What lovely flowers!' exclaimed Erica. 'How good of you! Where did they come from?'

'I made love to old Nicolls, the florist, to let me gather them myself; he was very anxious to make a gorgeous arrangement done up in white paper with a lace edge, and thought me a fearful Goth for preferring this disorderly bunch.'

They sat down to breakfast; afterwards, the morning papers came in, and Raeburn disappeared behind the *Daily Review,* while the servant cleared the table. Erica stood by the open French window; she knew that in a few minutes she must speak, and how to get what

she had to say into words she did not know. Her heart beat so fast that she felt almost choked. In a sort of dream of pain she watched the passers-by—happy-looking girls going down to bathe, children with spades and pails. Everything seemed so tranquil, so ordinary, while before her lay a duty which must change her whole world!

'Not much news,' said Raeburn, coming towards her as the servant left the room. 'For dulness commend me to a Monday paper! Well, Eric, how are we to spend your twenty-third birthday? To think that I have actually a child of twenty-three! Why, I ought to feel an old patriarch, and, in spite of white hair and life-long badgering, I don't, you know! Come, what shall we do? Where would you like to go?'

'Father,' said Erica, 'I want first to have a talk with you. I—I have something to tell you.'

There was no longer any mistaking that the seriousness meant some kind of trouble. Raeburn put his arm round her.

'Why, my little girl,' he said, tenderly.

'You are trembling all over! What is the matter?'

'The matter is that what I have to say will pain you, and it half kills me to do that. But there is no choice—tell you I must. You would not wish me not to be true, not to be honest.'

Utter perplexity filled Raeburn's mind. What phantom trouble was threatening him? Had she been commissioned to tell him of some untoward event?—some business calamity? Had she fallen in love with some one he could not permit her to marry? He looked questioningly at her, but her expression only perplexed him still more; she was trembling no longer, and her eyes were clear and bright, there was a strong look about her whole face.

'Father,' she said, quietly, 'I have learnt to believe in Jesus Christ.'

He wrenched away his arm; he started back from her as if she had stabbed him. For a minute he looked perfectly dazed.

At last, after a silence which seemed to each of them age-long, he spoke in the agitated voice of one who has just received a great blow,

'Do you know what you are saying, Erica? Do you know what such a confession as you have made will involve? Do you mean that you accept the whole of Christ's teaching?'

'Yes,' she replied, firmly, 'I do.'

'You intend to turn Christian?'

'Yes, to try to.'

'How long have you and Mr. Osmond been concocting this?'

'I don't know what you mean,' said Erica, terribly wounded by his tone.

'Did he send you down here to tell me?'

'Mr. Osmond knows nothing about it,' said Erica. 'How could I tell anyone before you, father!'

Raeburn was touched by this. He took several turns up and down the room before speaking again, but the more he grasped the idea the deeper grew his grief and the hotter his anger. He was a man of iron will, however, and he kept both under. When at length he did speak, his voice was quiet and cold and repressed.

'Sit down,' he said, motioning her to a chair. 'This is not a subject that we can dismiss in

five minutes' talk. I must hear your reasons. We will put aside all personal considerations. I will consider you just as an ordinary opponent.'

His coldness chilled her to the heart. Was it always to be like this? How could she possibly endure it! How was she to answer his questions,—how was she to vindicate her faith, when the mere tone of his voice seemed to paralyse her heart? He was indeed treating her with the cold formality of an opponent, but never for a single instant could she forget that he was her father—the being she loved best in the whole world.

But Erica was brave and true; she knew that this was a crisis in their lives, and, thrusting down her own personal pain, she forced herself to give her whole heart and mind to the searching and perplexing questions with which her father intended to test the reality of her convictions. Had she been unaccustomed to his mode of attack, he would have hopelessly silenced her, as far as argument goes, in half-an-hour; but not only was Erica's faith perfectly real, but she had, as it were, herself traversed the whole

of his objections and difficulties. Though far from imagining that she understood everything, she had yet so firmly grasped the innermost truth that all details as yet outside her vision were to her no longer hindrances and bugbears, but so many new possibilities—other hopes of fresh manifestations of God.

She held her ground well, and every minute Raeburn realised more keenly that whatever hopes he had entertained of re-convincing her were futile. What made it all the more painful to him was that the thoroughness of the training he had given her now only told against him, and the argument which he carried on in a cold, metallic voice was really piercing his very heart, for it was like arguing against another self, the dearest part of himself gone over to the enemy's side.

At last he saw that argument was useless, and then, in his grief and despair, he did for a time lose his self-control. Erica had often felt sorry for the poor creatures who had to bear the brunt of her father's seathing sarcasm. But platform irony was a trifle to the torrent which bore down upon her to-day. When a strong

man does lose his restraint upon himself, the result is terrific. Raeburn had never sufficiently cared for an adversary as to be moved beyond an anger which could be restricted and held within due bounds; he of course cared more for the success of his cause and his own dignity. But now his love drove him to despair; his intolerable grief at the thought of having an opponent in his own child burst all restraining bonds. Wounded to the quick, he who had never in his life spoken a harsh word to his child now poured forth such a storm of anger, and sarcasm, and bitter reproach, as might have made even an uninterested bystander tremble.

Had Erica made any appeal, had she even begun to cry, his chivalry would have been touched; he would have recognised her weakness, and regained his self-control. But she was not weak, she was strong—she was his other self gone over to the opposite side: that was what almost maddened him. The torrent bore down upon her, and she spoke not a word, but just sat still and endured. Only, as the words grew more bitter and more wounding, her lips grew white, her hands were locked

more tightly together. At last it ended.

'You have cheated yourself into this belief,' said Raeburn, 'you have given me the most bitter grief and disappointment of my whole life. Have you anything else you wish to say to me?'

'Nothing,' replied Erica, not daring to venture more; for, if she had tried to speak, she knew she must have burst into tears.

But there was as much pain expressed in her voice as she spoke that one word, as there had been in all her father's outburst. It appealed to him at once. He said no more, but stepped out of the French window, and began to pace to and fro under the verandah.

Erica did not stir; she was like one crushed. Sad and harassed as her life had been, it yet seemed to her that she had never known such indescribably bitter pain. The outside world looked bright and sunshiny; she could see the waves breaking on the shore, while beyond, sailing out into the wide expanse, was a brown-sailed fishing-boat. Every now and then her vision was interrupted by a tall dark figure pacing to and fro; every now and then the sun-

light glinted on snow-white hair, and then a fresh stab of pain awoke in her heart.

The brown-sailed fishing-boat dwindled into a tiny dark spot on the horizon, the sea tossed and foamed and sparkled in the sunshine. Erica turned away; she could not bear to look at it, for just now it seemed to her merely the type of the terrible separation which had arisen between herself and her father. She felt as if she were being borne away in the little fishing-boat, while he was left on the land, and the distance between them slowly widened and widened.

All through that grievous conversation she had held in her hand a little bit of mignonette. She had held it unconsciously; it was withered and drooping, its sweetness seemed to her now sickly and hateful. She identified it with her pain, and years after the smell of mignonette was intolerable to her. She would have thrown it away, but remembered that her father had given it her. And then, with the recollection of her birthday gift, came the realisation of all the long years of unbroken and perfect love, so rudely interrupted to-day. Was it always to be like

this? must they drift further and further apart?

Her heart was almost breaking; she had endured to the very uttermost, when at length comfort came. The sword had only come to bring the higher peace. No terrible sea of division could part those whom love could bind together. The peace of God stole once more into her heart.

> 'How loud soe'er the world may roar,
> We know love will be conqueror.'

Meanwhile Raeburn paced to and fro in grievous pain. The fact that his pain could scarcely perhaps have been comprehended by the generality of people did not make it less real or less hard to bear. A really honest atheist, who is convinced that Christianity is false and misleading, suffers as much at the sight of what he considers a mischievous belief as a Christian would suffer while watching a service in some heathen temple. Rather his pain would be greater, for his belief in the gradual progress of his creed is shadowy and dim compared with the Christian's conviction that the 'Saviour of all men' exists.

Once, some years before, a very able man,

one of his most devoted followers, had 'fallen back' into Christianity. That had been a bitter disappointment; but that his own child, whom he loved more than anything in the world, should have forsaken him and gone over to the enemy, was a grief well-nigh intolerable. It was a grief he had never for one moment contemplated.

Could anything be more improbable than that Erica, carefully trained as she had been, should relapse so strangely? Her whole life had been spent among atheists; there was not a single objection to Christianity which had not been placed before her. She had read much, thought much; she had worked indefatigably to aid the cause. Again and again she had braved personal insult and wounding injustice as an atheist. She had voluntarily gone into exile to help her father in his difficulties. Through the shameful injustice of a Christian, she had missed the last years of her mother's life, and had been absent from her death-bed. She had borne on behalf of her father's cause a thousand irritating privations, a thousand harassing cares; she had been hard-working, and

loyal, and devoted; and now all at once she had turned completely round, and placed herself in the opposing ranks!

Raeburn had all his life been fighting against desperate odds, and in the conflict he had lost well-nigh everything. He had lost his home long ago, he had lost his father's good-will, he had lost the whole of his inheritance; he had lost health, and strength, and reputation, and money: he had lost all the lesser comforts of life; and now he said to himself that he was to lose his dearest treasure of all, his child.

Bitter, hopeless, life-long division had arisen between them. For twenty-three years he had loved her as truly as ever father loved child, and this was his reward! A miserable sense of isolation arose in his heart. Erica had been so much to him—how could he live without her? The muscles of his face quivered with emotion; he clenched his hands almost fiercely.

Then he tortured himself by letting his thoughts wander back to the past. That very day years ago, when he had first learnt what fatherhood meant; the pride of watching his little girl as the years rolled on; the terrible

anxiety of one long and dangerous illness she had passed through—how well he remembered the time! They were very poor, could afford no expensive luxuries; he had shared the nursing with his wife. One night he remembered toiling away with his pen while the sick child was actually on his knee; he always fancied that the pamphlet he had then been at work on was more bitterly sarcastic than anything he had ever written. Then on once more into years of desperately hard work and disappointingly small results, embittered by persecution, crippled by penalties and never-ending litigation; but always there had been the little child waiting for him at home, who by her babylike freedom from care could make him smile when he was overwhelmed with anxiety. How could he ever have endured the bitter obloquy, the slanderous attacks, the countless indignities which had met him on all sides, if there had not been one little child who adored him, who followed him about like a shadow, who loved him and trusted him utterly?

Busy as his life had been, burdened as he had been for years with twice as much work as he

could get through, the child had never been crowded out of his life. Even as a little thing of four years old, Erica had been quite content to sit on the floor in his study by the hour together, quietly amusing herself by cutting old newspapers into fantastic shapes, or by drawing impossible cats and dogs and horses on the margins. She had never disturbed him; she used to talk to herself in whispers.

'Are you happy, little one?' he used to ask from time to time, with a sort of passionate desire that she should enjoy her unconscious childhood, foreseeing care and trouble for her in the future.

'Yes, vely happy,' had been the invariable response; and generally Erica would avail herself of the interruption to ask his opinion about some square-headed cat, with eyes askew and an astonishing number of legs, which she had just drawn. Then would come what she called a 'bear's hug,' after which silence reigned again in the study, while Raeburn would go on writing some argumentative pamphlet, hard and clear as crystal, his heart warmed by the little child's love, the remains of a smile lingering

about his lips at the recollection of the square-headed cat.

And the years passed on, and every year deepened and strengthened their love. And by slow degrees he had watched the development of her mind; had gloried in her quick perception; had learnt to come to her for a second opinion every now and then; had felt proud of her common-sense, her thoughtful judgments; had delighted in her enthusiastic, loving help. All this was ended now. Strange that, just as he hoped most from her, she should fail him! It was a repetition of his own early history exactly reversed. His thoughts went back to his father's study in the old Scottish parsonage. He remembered a long, fierce argument; he remembered a storm of abusive anger, and a furious dismissal from the house. The old pain came back to him vividly.

'And she loves me fifty thousand times more than I ever loved my father,' he reflected. 'And, though I was not abusive, I was hard on her. And, however mistaken, she was very brave, very honest! Oh, I was cruel to her—harsh, and hateful! My little child! my poor

little child! It shall not—it cannot divide us. I am hers, and she is mine—nothing can ever alter that.'

He turned, and went back into the room. Never had he looked grander than at that minute; this man who could hold thousands in breathless attention—this man who was more passionately loved by his friends, more passionately hated by his enemies than almost any man in England!—he was just the ideal father.

Erica had not stirred, she was leaning back in her chair, looking very still and white. He came close to her.

'Little son Eric!' he said, with a whole world of love in his tone.

She sprang up, and wreathed her arms round his neck.

By-and-by, they began to talk in low tones, to map out and piece together as well as they could the future life, which was inevitably severed from the past by a deep gulf. They spoke of the work which they could still share, of the interests they should still have in common. It was very sad work for Erica—infinitely sadder for Raeburn; but they were both of

them brave and noble souls, and they loved each other, and so could get above the sadness. One thing they both agreed upon. They would never argue about their opinions. They would, as far as possible, avoid any allusion to the grave differences that lay between them.

Late in the afternoon, a little group of fishermen and idlers stood on the beach. They were looking out seaward with some anxiety, for a sudden wind had arisen, and there was what they called an 'ugly sea.'

'I tell you it was madness to let 'em go alone on such a day,' said the old sailor with the telescope.

'And I tell you that the old gentleman pulls as good an oar as any of us,' retorted another man, in a blue Jersey and a sou'wester.

'Old gentleman, indeed!' broke in the coastguardsman. 'Better say devil at once! Why, man alive! your old gentleman is Luke Raeburn the atheist.'

'God forbid!' exclaimed the first speaker, lowering his telescope for a moment. 'Why, he be mighty friendly to us fishermen.'

'Where be they now, gaffer? D'ye see them?' asked a keen-looking lad of seventeen.

'Ay, there they be! there they be! God have mercy on 'em! They'll be swamped, sure as fate!'

The coastguardsman, with provoking *sang-froid* and indifference, began to sing,

> 'For, though his body's under hatches,
> His soul is gone alo-o-o-oft.'

Then breaking off into a sort of recitative,

'Which is exactly the opposite quarter to what Luke Raeburn's soul will go, I guess.'

'Blowed if I wouldn't pull an oar to save a mate, if I were so mighty sure he was going to the devil!' observed a weather-beaten seaman, with gold ear-rings and a good deal of tattooing on his brawny arms.

'Would you now!' said the coastguardsman, with a superior and sardonic smile. 'Well, in my 'umble opinion, drowning's too good for the blaspheming dog of an atheist.'

With which humane utterance, the coastguardsman walked off, singing of Tom who

> 'Never from his word departed,
> Whose heart was kind and soft.'

'Well, I, for one, will lend a hand to help them. Now then, mates! which of you is going to help to cheat the devil of his due?' said the man with the ear-rings.

Three men proffered their services, but the old seaman with the telescope checked them.

'Bide a bit, mates, bide a bit; I'm not sure you've a call to go.' He wiped the glasses of his telescope with a red handkerchief, and then looked out seaward once more.

In the meantime, while their fate was being discussed on the shore, Raeburn and Erica were face to face with death. They were a long way from land before the wind had sprung up so strongly. Raeburn, who in his young days had been at once the pride and the anxiety of the fishermen round his Scottish home, and noted for his rashness and daring, had now lost the freshness of his experience, and had grown forgetful of weather tokens. The danger was upon them before he had even thought of it. The strong wind blowing upon them, the delicious salt freshness, even the brisk motion, had been such a relief to them after the pain and

excitement of the morning. But all at once they began to realise that their peril was great. Their little boat tossed so fearfully that Erica had to cling to the seat for safety; one moment they were down in the hollow of a deep green wave, the next they would be tossed up upon its crest as though their boat had been a mere cockle-shell.

'I'm afraid we've made a mistake, Eric,' said Raeburn. 'I ought to have seen this storm coming up.'

'What?' cried Erica, for the dashing of the waves made the end of the sentence inaudible.

He looked across the boat at her, and an almost paralysing dread filled his heart. For himself he could be brave, for himself death had no terrors—but for his child?

A horrible vision rose before him. He saw her lying stiff and cold, with glazed eyes and drenched hair. Was there to be a yet more terrible separation between them? Was death to snatch her from him? Ah, no—that should never be! They would at least go down together.

The vision faded; he saw once more the fair,

eager face, no longer pallid, but flushed with excitement, the brave eyes clear and bright, but somewhat anxious. The consciousness that everything depended on him helped him to rise above that overmastering horror. He was once more his strongest self.

The rudder had been left on the beach, and it was only possible to steer by the oars. He dismissed even the thought of Erica, and concentrated his whole being on the difficult task before him. So grand did he look in that tremendous endeavour that Erica almost forgot her anxiety; there was something so forceful in his whole aspect that she could not be afraid. Her heart beat quickly indeed, but the consciousness of danger was stimulating.

Yet the waves grew more and more furious, rolling, curling, dashing up in angry white foam—'raging horribly.' At length came one which broke right over the little boat, blinding and drenching its occupants.

'Another like that will do for us,' said Raeburn, in a quiet voice.

The boat was half full of water. Erica began to bale out with her father's hat, and each knew

from the other's face that their plight was hopeless.

Raeburn had faced death many times. He had faced it more than once on a sick-bed, he had faced it surrounded by yelling and furious mobs, but he had never faced it side by side with his child. Again he looked at the angry grey-green waves, at the wreaths of curling white foam, again that awful vision rose before him, and, brave man as he was, he shuddered.

Life was sweet even though he was harassed, persecuted, libelled. Life was sweet even though his child had deserted his cause, even though she had 'cheated herself into a belief.' Life was infinitely worth living, mere existence an exquisite joy, blank nothingness a hideous alternative.

'Bale out!' he cried, despair in his eyes, but a curve of resoluteness about his lips.

A few more strokes warily pulled, another huge wave swooping along, rearing itself up, dashing down upon them. The boat reeled and staggered. To struggle longer was useless. Raeburn threw his oars in board, caught hold of Erica, and held her fast. When they could see

once more, they found the boat quite three parts full.

'Child!' he said, 'child!' But nothing more would come. For once in his life words failed him; the orator was speechless. Was it a minute or an eternity that he waited there through that awful pause—waited with his arm round Erica, feeling the beating of her heart, the heart which must soon cease beating for ever, feeling her warm breath on his cheek—alas! how few more breaths would she draw! How soon would the cold watery grave close over all that he——

His thoughts were abruptly checked. That eternal minute of waiting was over. It was coming—death was coming—riding along with mocking scorn on the crest of a giant wave. Higher and higher rose the towering, sea-green wall, mockingly it rushed forward, remorselessly swooped down upon them! This time the boat was completely swamped.

'I will at least die fighting!' thought Raeburn, a despairing, defiant courage inspiring him with almost superhuman strength.

'Trust to me!' he cried. 'Don't struggle!'

And Erica, who would naturally have fallen into that frantic and vain convulsion which seizes most people when they find themselves in peril of drowning, by a supreme effort of will made no struggle at all, but only clung to her father.

Raeburn was a very strong man, and an expert swimmer, but it was a fearful sea. They were dashed hither and thither, they were buffeted, and choked, and blinded, but never once did he lose his presence of mind. Every now and then he even shouted out a few words to Erica. How strange his voice sounded in that chaos, in that raging symphony of winds and waves.

'Tell me when you can't hold any longer,' he cried.

'I can't leave go,' returned Erica.

And even then, in that desperate minute, they both felt a momentary thrill of amusement. The fact was, that her effort of will had been so great when she had obeyed him, and clung with all her might to him, that now the muscles of her hands absolutely would not relax their hold.

It seemed endless! Over the cold green and

white of the waves Raeburn seemed to see his whole life stretched out before him in a series of vivid pictures, All the long struggles, all the desperate fights wreathed themselves out in visions round this supreme death-struggle. And always there was the consciousness that he was toiling for Erica's life, struggling, agonising, straining every fibre of his being to save her.

But what was this paralysing cold creeping over his limbs? What this pressure at his heart?—this dimness of his eyes? Oh! was his strength failing him? Was the last hope, indeed, gone? Panting, he struggled on.

'I will do thirty more strokes!' he said to himself.

And he did them.

'I will do ten more!'

And he forced himself to keep on.

'Ten more!'

He was gasping now. Erica's weight seemed to be dragging him down, down, into nothingness.

Six strokes painfully made! Seven!—After all nothingness would mean rest. Eight!—No pain

to either, since they were together. Nine!—He should live on in the hearts of his people. Ten! —Agony of failure! he was beaten at last!

What followed they neither of them knew, only there was a shout, an agony of sinking, a vision of a dark form and a something solid which they grasped convulsively.

When Erica came to herself they were by no means out of danger, but there was something between them and the angry sea. She was lying down at the bottom of a boat in close proximity to some silvery-skinned fishes, and her father was holding her hand.

Wildly they tossed for what seemed to her a very long time; but at length fresh voices were heard, the keel grated on the shore, she felt herself lifted up and carried on to the beach. Then, with an effort, she stood up once more, trembling and exhausted, but conscious that mere existence was rapture.

Raeburn paused to reward and thank the men who had rescued them in his most genial manner, and Erica's happiness would have been complete had not the coastguardsman stepped up in an insolent and officious way, and observed,

'It is a pity, Mr. Luke Raeburn, that you don't bring yourself to offer thanks to God Almighty!'

'Sir,' replied Raeburn, 'when I ask your opinion on my personal and private matters, it will be fitting that you should speak—not before!'

The man looked annihilated, and turned away.

Raeburn grasped the rough hands of his helpers and well wishers, gave his arm to Erica, and led her up the steep beach.

Later on in the evening they sat over the fire, and talked over their adventure. June though it was, they had both been thoroughly chilled.

'What did you think of when we were in the water?' asked Erica.

'I made a deep calculation,' said Raeburn, smiling, 'and found that the sale of the plant and of all my books would about clear off the last of the debts, and that I should die free. After that I thought of Cicero's case of the two wise men struggling in the sea with one plank to rescue them sufficient only for one. They were to decide which of their lives was most useful

to the republic, and the least useful man was to drop down quietly into the deep. It struck me that you and I should hardly come to such a calculation. I think we would have gone down together, little one! What did you think of?'

But Erica's thoughts could not so easily be put into words.

'For one thing,' she said, 'I thought we should never be divided any more.'

She sighed a little; for, after all, the death they had so narrowly escaped would have been so infinitely easier than the life which lay before her.

'Clearly we are inseparable!' said Raeburn. 'In that sense, little son Eric, we can still say, "We fear nae foe!"'

Perhaps the gentle words, and the sadness which he could not entirely banish from his tone, moved Erica almost more than his passionate utterances in the morning.

The day was no bad miniature of her whole life. Very sad, very happy, full of danger, conflict, and strife, warmed by outside sympathy, wounded by outside insolence!

CHAPTER V.

WHAT IT INVOLVED.

Stronger than steel
Is the sword of the spirit;
Swifter than arrows
The life of the truth is;
Greater than anger
Is love, and subdueth.

LONGFELLOW.

THE two or three days at Codrington lengthened out into a week, for both Raeburn and Erica felt a good deal exhausted after the eventful Monday. Raeburn, anxious to spare her as much as possible, himself wrote to Mrs. Craigie, and told her of Erica's change of views.

'It is a great grief,' he wrote, 'and she will be a serious loss to our cause, but I am determined that we will not enact over again the course of action which drove both you and me

from home. Odd! that she should just reverse our story! Anyhow, you and I, Jean, have been too much persecuted to turn into persecutors. The child is as much in earnest for her delusion as we for our truth. Argument and remonstrance will do no good, and you must understand, and make Tom understand, that I'll not have her bullied. Don't think that I am trying to make her mistaken way all easy for her. She won't find it easy. She will have a miserable time of it with our own set, and how many Christians, do you imagine, will hold out a hand to Luke Raeburn's daughter, even though her views have changed. Maybe, half-a-dozen! not more, I fancy, unless she renounced us with atheism, and that she never will do! She will be between two fires, and I believe between the two she will be worried to death in a year unless we can keep the peace at home. I don't blame Osmond for this, though at first I did suspect it was his doing; but this has been no cram-work. Erica has honestly faced the questions herself, and has honestly arrived at this mistaken conclusion. Osmond's kindness and generosity of course influenced her, but for

the rest they have only had the free discussions of which from the first I approved. Years ago he said to me plainly, "What if she should see reason to change her mind?"

'I scouted the notion then, it seemed—and still seems—almost *incredible*. He has, you see, acted quite honourably. It is Erica's own doing. I remember telling him that our name of Free-thinkers was a reality, and so it shall still be! She shall be free to think the untrue is the true; she shall be free to confess herself a Christian before the whole world, though it deal me the hardest of blows.'

This letter soon spread the news. Aunt Jean was too much vexed and not deeply grieved enough to keep silence. Vexation finds some relief in talking, deep grief as a rule prefers not to speak. Tom, in his odd way, felt the defection of his favourite cousin as much as anybody, except Raeburn himself. They had been playfellows, they had always been like brother and sister together, and he was astounded to think that Erica of all people in the world should have deserted the cause. The letter had come by one of the evening posts. He went out and

paced up and down the square in the soft midsummer twilight, trying to realise the facts of the case. Presently he heard rapid steps behind him; no one walked at that pace excepting Brian, and Tom was quite prepared to feel an arm link itself within his.

'Hullo, old fellow!' exclaimed Brian. 'Moonlight meditations?'

'Where did you drop from?' said Tom, evasively.

'Broken leg, round the corner—a public-house row. What brutes men are!' exclaimed the young doctor, hotly.

'Disappointing world altogether,' said Tom, with a sigh. 'What do you think we have just heard about Erica?'

Brian's heart almost stopped beating; he hardly knew what he feared.

'How can I tell?' he answered, hoarsely. 'No bad news, I hope?'

'She's gone and turned Christian,' said Tom, in a tone of deep disgust.

Brian started.

'Thank God!' he exclaimed, under his breath.

'Confound it!' cried Tom. 'I forgot you'd be

triumphant. Good night,' and he marched off in high dudgeon.

Brian did not even miss him. How could he at such a time? The weight of years had been lifted off his soul. A consuming happiness took possession of him; his whole being was a thanksgiving. By-and-by he went home, found his father in the study, and was about to speak, when Charles Osmond put an open letter into his hand. While Raeburn had written to his sister, Erica had written to her 'prophet'—a sad, happy, quaint letter exactly like herself. Its straightforward simplicity brought the tears to Brian's eyes.

'It will be a fearful life for her now!' he exclaimed. 'She will never be able to endure it. Father, now at last I may surely speak to her!'

He spoke very eagerly. Charles Osmond looked grave.

'My dear old fellow, of course you must do as you think best,' he replied, after a minute's pause; 'but I doubt if it is wise just now.'

'Why, it is the very time of all others when she might be glad of me,' said Brian.

'But can't you see,' returned his father, 'that

Erica is the last girl in the world to marry a man because she was unhappy, or because she had got a difficult bit of life in front of her? Of course, if you really think she cares for you, it is different; but——'

'She does not care for me,' said Brian, quickly; 'but in time I think she would. I think I could make her happy.'

'Yes, I think you could; but I fancy you will make shipwreck of your hopes if you speak to her now. Have patience.'

'I am sick of patience!' cried poor Brian, desperately. 'Have I not been patient for nearly seven years? For what would you have me wait? Am I to wait till, between our injustice to secularists and their injustice to Christians, she is half badgered out of life? If she could but love me, if she would marry me now, I could save her from what must be a life of misery.'

'If I could but get you to see it from what I am convinced is Erica's point of view!' exclaimed Charles Osmond. 'Forget for a minute that you are her knight and champion, and try to see things as she sees them. Let us try to

reverse things. Just imagine for a minute that you are the child of some leading man, the head and chief of a party or association—we'll say that you are the child of an Archbishop of Canterbury. You are carefully educated, you become a zealous worker, you enter into all your father's interests, you are able to help him in a thousand ways. But, by slow degrees, we will say that you perceive a want in the system in which you have been educated, and, after many years of careful study and thought, you are obliged to reject your former beliefs, and to accept that other system which shall most recommend itself to you. We will suppose for the sake of analogy that you become a secularist. Knowing that your change of views will be a terrible grief to your father the archbishop, it takes your whole strength to make your confession, and you not only feel your father's personal pain, but you feel that his pain will be increased by his public position. To make it worse, too, we must suppose that a number of people calling themselves atheists, and in the name of atheism, have at intervals for the last thirty years been annoying and insulting your

father, that in withstanding their attacks he has often received bodily injury, and that the atheists have so often driven him into the law courts that he has been pretty nearly beggared. All his privations you have shared—for instance, you went with him and lived for years in a poky little lodging, and denied yourself every single luxury. But now you have, in spite of all these persecutions carried on in the name of secularism, learned to see that the highest form of secularism is true. The archbishop feels this terribly. However, being a very loving father, he wisely refuses to indulge in perpetual controversy with his child. You agree still to live together, and each try with all your might to find all the possible points of union still left you. Probably, if you are such a child as I imagine, you love your father ten times more than you did before. Then just as you have made up your mind to try to be more to him, when all you care about in life is to comfort and help him, and when your heart is much occupied with your new opinions, a friend of yours—a secularist—comes to you, and says, "A miserable life lies before you! The atheists will

never thoroughly take up with you while you live with your father the archbishop, and of course it is wretched for you to be surrounded by those of another creed. Come with me! I love you—I will make you happy, and save you from persecution!"'

In spite of himself, Brian had smiled many times at this putting of an Archbishop of Canterbury into the position of Luke Raeburn. But the conclusion arrived at seemed to him to admit of only one answer, and left him very grave.

'You may be right,' he said, very sadly. 'But to stand still and watch her suffer——'

He broke off, unable to finish his sentence.

Charles Osmond took it up.

'To stand still and watch her suffer will be the terribly hard work of a brave man who takes a true, deep view. To rush in with offers of help would be the work of an impetuous man who took a very superficial view. If Erica were selfish, I would say go and appeal to her selfishness, and marry her at once; for selfishness will never do any good in Guilford Terrace. But she is one of the most devoted

women I know! Your appeal would be rejected. I believe she will feel herself in the right place there, and, as long as that is the case, nothing will move her.'

'Father,' said Brian, rather desperately, 'I would take your opinion before any other opinion in the world. You know her well—far better than I do. Tell me honestly—do you think she could ever love me?'

'You have given me a hard task,' said Charles Osmond. 'But you have asked for my honest opinion, and you must have it. As long as her father lives, I don't believe Erica will ever love a man well enough to marry him. I remember, in my young days, a beautiful girl in our neighbourhood, the belle of the whole county; and years went by, and she had countless offers, but she rejected them all. People used to remonstrate with her, and ask her how it was. "Oh," she used to reply, "that is very easily explained. I never see a man I think equal to my own brothers!" Now, whatever faults Raeburn has, we may be sure Erica sees far less plainly than we see, and nobody can deny that he is a grand fellow. When one bears in mind

all that he has had against him, his nobility of character seems to me simply marvellous. He puts us to shame! And that is why he seems to me the wholesome though powerful medicine for this nineteenth century of ours, with its great professions and its un-Christlike lives.'

'What is the use of patience—what is the use of love,' exclaimed Brian, 'if I am never to serve her?'

'Never! Who said so!' said his father, smiling. 'Why, you have been serving her every blessed day since you first loved her. Is unspoken love nothing worth? Are prayers useless? Is it of no service to let your light shine? But I see how it is. As a doctor, you look upon pain as the one great enemy to be fought with, to be bound down, to be conquered. You want to shield Erica from pain, which she can't be shielded from, if she is to go on growing.

"Knowledge by suffering entereth!"

No one would so willingly endorse the truth of that as she herself! And it will be so to the end of the chapter. You can't shut her up in a beautiful casket, and keep her from all pain!

If you could, she would no longer be the Erica you love. As for the rest, I may be wrong. She may have room for wifely love even now. I have only told you what I think. And whether she ever be your wife or not—and from my heart I hope she may be—your love will in no case be wasted. Pure love can't be wasted; it's an impossibility.'

Brian sighed heavily, but made no answer. Presently he took up his hat, and went out. He walked on and on without the faintest idea of time or place, occupied only with the terrible struggle which was going on in his heart, which seemed only endurable with the help of rapid and mechanical exercise. When at length he came to himself, he was miles away from home, right down at Shepherd's Bush, and he heard the church clocks striking twelve. Then he turned back, and walked home more quietly, his resolution made.

If he told Erica of his love, and she refused him now, he should not only add to her troubles, but he should inevitably put an end to the comfort of the close friendship which now existed between the two families. He would keep silence.

Erica and her father returned on the Saturday, and then began a most trying time. Tom seemed to shrink from her just as he had done at the time of her mother's death. He was shy and vexed, too, and kept as much out of her way as possible. Mrs. Craigie, on the contrary, could not leave her alone. In spite of her brother's words, she tried every possible argument and remonstrance in the hope of re-convincing her niece. With the best intentions, she was often grossly unfair, and Erica, with a naturally quick temper, and her Raeburn inheritance of fluency and satire, found her patience sorely tried. Raeburn was excessively busy, and they saw very little of him; perhaps he thought it expedient that Erica should fight her own battles, and fully realise the seriousness of the step she had taken.

'Have you thought,' urged Mrs. Craigie, as a last argument—'have you thought what offence you will give to our whole party? What do you think they will say when they learn that you of all people have deserted the cause?'

The tears started to Erica's eyes, for naturally she did feel this a great deal. But she answered

bravely, and with a sort of ring in her voice, which made Tom look up from his newspaper,

'They will know that Luke Raeburn's daughter must be true to her convictions, at whatever cost.'

'Will you go on writing in the *Idol?*' asked Tom, for the first time making an observation to her which was not altogether necessary.

'No,' said Erica—'how can I?'

Tom shrugged his shoulders, and made no further remark.

'Then how do you mean to live? How else can you support yourself?' asked Aunt Jean.

'I don't know,' said Erica. 'I must get some other work—somewhere.'

But her heart failed her, though she spoke firmly. She knew that to find work in London was no easy matter.

'Offer yourself to the *Church Chronicle*,' said Mrs. Craigie, sarcastically, 'or, better still, to the *Watch-Dog*. They always make a good deal of capital out of a convert.'

Erica coloured, and had to bite her lip hard to keep back the quick retort which occurred to her all too naturally.

By-and-by Mr. Masterman and another well-known secularist walked in. They both knew of Erica's defection. Mr. Masterman attacked her at once in a sort of bantering way.

'So, Miss Raeburn, now I understand why some time ago you walked out in the middle of my lecture one evening.'

And then followed a most irritating semi-serious remonstrance, in questionable taste. Erica writhed under it. A flippant canvassing of her most private and sacred thoughts was hard to bear, but she held her ground, and, being not without a touch of her father's dignity, Mr. Masterman presently beat a retreat, not feeling quite so well satisfied with himself as usual. His companion did not allude directly to her change of views, but treated her with a sort of pitying condescension, as if she had been a mild lunatic.

There was some sort of committee being held in the study that evening. The next person to arrive was Professor Gosse, and almost immediately after came Mr. Harmston, a charming old man, whom Erica had known from her childhood. They came in and had some coffee

before going in to the study. Mrs. Craigie talked to Mr. Harmston. Erica, looking her loveliest, waited on them. Tom watched them all philosophically from the hearthrug.

'I am sorry to hear you have deserted your colours,' said the professor, looking more grave than she had ever seen him look before. Then, his voice softening a little as he looked at her, 'I expect it all comes of that illness of yours. I believe religion is just an outgrowth of bad health—*mens sana in corpore sano*, you know. Never mind, you must still come to my workshop, and I shall see if science won't re-convert you.'

He moved away with his good-humoured, shaggy-looking face, leaving Erica to old Mr. Harmston.

'I am much grieved to hear this of you, Erica,' he said, lowering his voice, and bringing his grey head near to hers—'as grieved as if you were my own child. You will be a sore loss to us all.'

Erica felt this keenly, for she was very fond of the old man.

'Do you think it does not hurt me to grieve

you all?' she said, piteously. 'But one must be honest.'

'Quite right, my dear,' said the old man, 'but that does not make our loss the less heavy. We had hoped great things of you, Erica. It is grievous to me that you should have fallen back to the miserable superstitions against which your father has fought so bravely.'

'Come, Mr. Harmston,' said the professor; 'we are late, I fancy.'

And, before Erica could make any reply, Mrs. Craigie and the two visitors had adjourned to the committee-room, leaving her alone with Tom.

Now, for two or three days Erica had been enduring Tom's coldness and Mrs. Craigie's unceasing remonstrances; all the afternoon she had been having a long and painful discussion with her friend, Mrs. MacNaughton; this evening she had seen plainly enough what her position would be for the future among all her old acquaintances, and an aching sense of isolation filled her heart. She was just going to run upstairs and yield to her longing for darkness and quiet, when Tom called her back. She could

not refuse to hear, for the coldness of her old playmate had made her very sad, but she turned back rather reluctantly, for her eyes were brimming with tears.

'Don't go,' said Tom, quite in his natural voice. 'Have you any coffee for me, or did the old fogies finish it?'

Erica went back to the table and poured him out a cup of coffee; but her hand trembled, and, before she could prevent it, down splashed a great tear into the saucer.

'Come!' said Tom, cheerfully. 'Don't go and spoil my coffee with salt water! All very well for David, in a penitential psalm, to drink tears, but in the nineteenth century, you know——'

Erica began to laugh at this, a fatal proceeding, for afterwards came a great sob, and the tears came down in good earnest. Philosophical Tom always professed great contempt for tears, and he knew that Erica must be very much moved indeed to cry in his presence, or, indeed, to cry at all; for, as he expressed it, 'It was not in her line.' But somehow, when for the first time he saw her cry, he did not feel contemptu-

ous; instead, he began to call himself a 'hard-hearted brute,' and a 'narrow-minded fool,' and to feel miserable and out of conceit with himself.

'I say, Erica, don't cry,' he pleaded. 'Don't, I say, I can't bear to see you. I've been a cold-blooded wretch—I'm awfully sorry!'

'It's very cowardly of me,' sobbed Erica. 'But—but—' with a rush of tears, 'you don't know how I love you all—it's like being killed by inches.'

'You're not cowardly,' said Tom, warmly. 'You've been brave and plucky; I only wish it were in a better cause. Look here, Erica, only stop crying, and promise me that you'll not take this so dreadfully to heart. I'll stand by you—I will, indeed, even though I hate your cause. But it shan't come between us any longer, the hateful delusion has spoilt enough lives already. It shan't spoil ours!'

'Oh, don't!' cried Erica, wounded anew by this.

'Well,' said Tom, gulping down his longing to inveigh against Christianity, 'it goes hard with me not to say a word against the religion

that has brought us all our misery, but for your sake I'll try not when talking with you. Now let us begin again on the old footing.'

'Not quite on the old footing either,' said Erica, who had conquered her tears. 'I love you a thousand times more, you dear old Tom.'

And Tom, who was made of sterling stuff, did from that day forward stand by her through everything, and checked himself when harsh words about religious matters rose to his lips, and tried his best to smooth what could not fail to be a rough bit of walking.

The first meeting between Charles Osmond and Erica, after her return from Codrington, did not come about till the morning after her conversation with Tom. They had each called on the other, but had somehow managed to miss. When at length Erica was shown into the study, connected in her mind with so many warm discussions, she found it empty. She sat down in the great arm-chair by the window, wondering if she were indeed the same Erica who had sat there years before, on the day when her 'prophet' had foretold her illness. What changes had come about since then!

But her 'prophet' was unchanged, his brisk Well, Erica!' was exactly what it had been when she had come to him in the days of her atheism. It had always been full of welcome and sympathy, and now the only difference was that a great happiness shone in his eyes as he came forward with his soft, steady tread and took her hand in both his.

They sat silent for a while, then talked a little but reservedly, for both felt that the subject which filled their thoughts was at once too sacred and too personal to be altogether put into words. Then by-and-by they began to discuss the practical consequences of the change, and especially the great difficulty as to Erica's means of supporting herself.

'Could you not try teaching?' said Charles Osmond.

'The market is already overstocked.'

'True, but I should think that your brains and certificates ought to secure you work in spite of that.'

'I should like it in many ways,' said Erica, 'but, you see, except at the night-school it is out of the question, and I could not live upon my

grant even if every one of my class passed the examination. For any other sort of teaching, —who do you imagine would have the courage to employ anyone bearing the name of Raeburn? Why, I can't give an order in a shop without being looked all over by the person who takes the address. No, governessing would be all very well if one might assume a *nom de guerre*, but that would not do, you see.'

'You couldn't find work of that sort among your own set, I suppose?'

'Not now,' said Erica. 'You see, naturally enough, I am very much out of favour with them all.'

'Falling between two stools,' said Charles Osmond, half to himself. 'But don't lose heart, Erica; "A stone that is fit for the wall will not be left in the way;" there is work for you somewhere. By the way, I might see old Crutchley, —he knows all the literary folk, and might get you an introduction to some one, at any rate.'

Just as Erica was leaving, Brian came in from his rounds, and they met at the door. Had

he known her trouble and perplexity as to work, no power on earth could have induced him to keep silence any longer; but he knew nothing. She looked a little pale, but that was natural enough, and in her eyes he could see a peace which he had never seen there before. Then deep unselfish happiness filled his heart again, and Erica recognised in his greeting a great deal more than an ordinary bystander would have seen. She went away feeling bettered by that hand-clasp.

'That is a downright good man!' she thought to herself. 'Perhaps by the time he's fifty-five he'll be almost equal to his father.'

CHAPTER VI.

AN EDITOR.

SOCRATES.—How singular is the thing called pleasure, and how curiously related to pain, which might be thought to be the opposite; for they never come to a man together, and yet he who pursues either of them is generally compelled to take the other. They are two, and yet they grow together out of one head or stem; and I cannot help thinking that, if Æsop had noticed them, he would have made a fable about God trying to reconcile their strife, and when he could not, he fastened their heads together; and this is the reason why when one comes the other follows.

PLATO.

THAT ERICA should live any longer upon the money which her father chiefly made by the dissemination of views with which she disagreed, was clearly impossible, at least impossible to one of her sincere and thorough nature. But to find work was very difficult indeed. After an anxious waiting and searching, she was one day surprised by receiving through Charles Os-

mond's friend, Mr. Crutchley, an introduction to the editor of a well-known and widely read paper. Everyone congratulated her, but she could not feel very hopeful, it seemed too good to prove true—it was in fact so exactly the position which she would herself have chosen that it seemed unlikely it should ever really be hers. Still of course she hoped, and arrangements were made for an interview with Mr. Bircham, editor and part-proprietor of the *Daily Review*.

Accordingly, one hot summer morning Erica dressed herself carefully, tried to look old and serious, and set off with Tom to the city.

'I'll see you safe to the door of the lion's den,' said Tom, as they made their way along the crowded streets. 'I only wish I could be under the table during the interview; I should like to see you doing the dignified journalist.'

'I wouldn't have you for the world!' said Erica, laughing. Then, growing grave again, 'Oh, Tom! how I wish it were over! it's worse than three hundred visits to a dentist rolled into one!'

'Appalling prospect!' said Tom. 'I can

exactly picture what it will be! *Bircham!* such a forbidding name for an editor! He'll be a sort of editorial Mr. Squeers; he'll talk in a loud blustering way, and you'll feel exactly like a journalistic Smike.'

'No,' said Erica, laughing. 'He'll be a neat little dapper man, very smooth and bland, and he'll talk patronisingly and raise my hopes, and then, in a few days' time, will send me a polite refusal.'

'Tell him at once that you hero-worship Sir Michael Cunningham, the statesman of the age, the most renowned "Sly Bacon!"'

'Tom, do be quiet!' said Erica. 'I wish you had never thought of that horrid name.'

'Horrid! I mean to make my fortune out of it. If you like, you can offer the pun on reasonable terms to Mr. Bircham!'

'Why, this is Fleet Street! doesn't it lead out of this?' said Erica, with an indescribable feeling in the back of her neck. 'We must be quite near.'

'Nearer than near,' said Tom. 'Now, then, left wheel! Here we are, you see! It's a mercy that you turn pink with fright, not

green like the sea-green Robespierre. Go in looking as pretty as that, and Mr. Squeers will graciously accept your services unless he's sand-blind!'

'What a tease you are! Do be quiet,' implored Erica. And then, in what seemed to her an alarmingly short time, she was actually left by herself to beard the lion, and a clerk was assuring her that Mr. Bircham was in, and would she walk upstairs.

For reasons best known to himself, the editor of the *Daily Review* had his private room at the very top of the house. A sedate clerk led the way up a dingy staircase, and Erica toiled after him, wondering how much breath she should have left by the time she reached the end. On one of the landings she caught sight of a sandy cat, and felt a little reassured at meeting such an everyday creature in this grim abode; she gave it a furtive stroke as she passed, and would have felt it a protection if she could have picked it up and taken it with her. That would have been undignified, however, and by the time she reached the editor's room only a very observant person could have discovered

in her frank, self-possessed manner any trace of nervousness.

So different was Mr. Bircham from their preconceived notions that she could almost have laughed at the contrast. He was very tall and pompous, he wore a lank brown wig which looked as if it might come off at any moment, he had little keen grey eyes which twinkled, and a broad mouth which shut very closely; whether it was grim or humorous she could not quite decide. He was sitting in a swivel chair, and the table strewn with letters, and the desk, with its pigeon-holes crammed with papers, looked so natural and so like her father's that she began to feel a reassuring sense of fellowship with this entire stranger. The inevitable paste-pot and scissors, the piles of newspapers, the books of reference, all looked home-like to her.'

Mr. Bircham rose and bowed rather formally, motioned her to a seat, and swung round his own chair so that they faced one another. Then he scanned her from head to foot with the sort of appraising glance to which she was only too well accustomed,—a glance which said

as plainly as words, 'Oh! so you are that atheist's daughter, are you?'

But, whatever impression Erica made upon Mr. Bircham, not a muscle of his face altered, and he began to discuss business in a most formal and business-like way. Things did not seem very hopeful, and Erica began to doubt more and more whether she had the smallest chance of acceptance. Something in the dry formal manner of the editor struck a chill to her heart. So much, so very much depended on this interview, and already the prospect seemed far from hopeful.

'I should like to see some of your work,' observed Mr. Bircham. 'How long have you been in the habit of writing in Mr. Raeburn's organ?'

'For the last five years,' said Erica.

Mr. Bircham lifted his shaggy eyebrows at this, for Erica looked even younger than she really was. However, he made no comment, but took up the end of a speaking tube.

'Send up Jones with the file of *Idol-Breakers* I ordered.'

Erica's colour rose. Presently the answer

from the lower regions appeared in the shape of the sedate clerk carrying a great bundle of last year's *Idol-Breakers*.

'Perhaps you will show me one or two of your average articles,' said Mr. Bircham, and, while Erica searched through the bundle of papers, he took up one of the copies which she had put aside, and studied the outside page critically. '*The Idol-Breaker:* Advocate of Free-thought and Secularism. Edited by Luke Raeburn.'

> 'They are slaves who dare not be
> In the right with two or three.'

Mr. Bircham put it down, and began to watch her attentively. She was absorbed in her search, and was quite unconscious of his scrutiny. Even had she noticed him, she would not have understood what was passing in his mind. His little grey eyes grew bright; then he pushed back his wig impatiently; then he cleared his throat; finally he took snuff, sneezed violently, and walked to the window. When he returned, he was even more dry and formal than before.

'These, I think, are fairly representative,' said Erica. 'I have marked them in the margin.'

He took the three or four copies she handed to him, and began to look through one of the articles, muttering a sentence half-aloud every now and then, and making little ejaculations which might have been either of approval or disapproval.

Finally the interview ended. Mr. Bircham put down the papers with a sigh of utter weariness, Erica thought.

'Well, Miss Raeburn,' he remarked, 'I will look at one or two of your other articles, and will communicate with you in a few days' time.'

Then he shook hands with her with frigid politeness, and in another minute she was slowly making her way down the dingy staircase. Partly from the reaction after her excitement, partly from mental worry and physical weariness, she felt by the time she was fairly out of the office as if she could hardly drag herself along. Her heart was like lead, blank loss of hope and wearing anxiety as to the next effort to be made were weighing her down. She was naturally high-spirited, but when high-spirited people do get depressed, they go down to the very deepest depths; and her interview

with Mr. Bircham, by its dry cheerlessness, by its lack of human interest, had chilled her all through. If he had even made a remark on the weather, she thought she could have liked him better; if he had expressed an opinion on any subject, even if she had disagreed with him, it would have been a relief; as it was, he seemed to her more like a hard steel pen dressed in broadcloth than a man.

As to his last remark, that could only mean one thing. He did not like to tell her to her face that she would not suit him, but he would communicate with her in a few days, and say it comfortably on paper.

She had never felt quite so desolate and forlorn and helpless as she felt that day when she left the *Daily Review* office, and found herself in the noise and bustle of Fleet Street. The midday sun blazed down upon her in all its strength; the pavements seemed to scorch her feet; the weary succession of hurrying, pushing, jostling passengers seemed to add to her sense of isolation. Presently a girl stopped her, and asked the way to Basinghall Street. She knew it well enough, but felt too utterly stupid to direct her.

'You had better ask a policeman,' she replied, wearily.

Then, recollecting that she had several commissions to do for her father, besides a great deal to do at the Stores, she braced herself up, and tried to forget Mr. Bircham, and to devote her whole mind to the petty details of shopping.

The next evening, she was in the study with her father when Tom brought in a bundle of letters. One of them was for Erica. She at once recognised Mr. Bircham's writing, and a new pang of disappointment shot through her, though she had really lost all hope on the previous day. This very speedy communication could only mean that his mind had been practically made up before. She began to think of her next chance, of the next quarter she must try, and slowly opened the unwelcome letter. But in a moment she had sprung to her feet in an ecstasy of happiness.

'Oh, father! oh, Tom! he will have me!'

Raeburn looked up from his correspondence, and together they read Mr. Bircham's letter. It was quite as business-like as he himself had been at the interview.

'DEAR MADAM,

'Having fully considered the matter, we are prepared to offer you a place on our staff. The work required was explained to you yesterday. For this we offer a salary of £200 per annum. Should you signify your acceptance of these terms, we will send you our usual form of agreement.

'I am, yours faithfully,

'JACOB BIRCHAM.

'TO MISS RAEBURN.'

'Commend me to people who don't raise one's expectations!' said Erica, rapturously. 'Three cheers for my dear, stiff old editor!'

So that anxiety was over, and Erica was most thankful to have such a load taken off her mind. The comfort of it helped her through a very trying summer.

CHAPTER VII.

ERICA TO THE RESCUE.

ISABEL.—I have spirit to do anything that appears not foul
in the truth of my spirit.
DUKE.—Virtue is bold, and goodness never fearful.
Measure for Measure.

IT was the first of September. Watering-places were crowded with visitors, destruction had begun among the partridges, and a certain portion of the hard-working community were taking their annual holiday.

Raeburn, whose holidays were few and far between, had been toiling away all through the summer months in town. This evening, as he sat in his stifling little study, he had fallen into a blank fit of depression. He could neither work nor read. Strong as his nature was, it was not always proof against this grim demon,

which avenged itself on him for overtasking his brain, shortening his hours of sleep, and in other ways sacrificing himself to his work. To-night, however, there was reason for his depression; for while he sat fighting his demon at home, Erica had gone to Charles Osmond's church—it was the evening of her baptism.

Of course it was the necessary sequence of the confession she had made a few months before, and Raeburn had long known that it was inevitable; but none the less did he this evening suffer more acutely than he had yet suffered, realising more fully his child's defection. The private confession had startled, shocked, grieved him inexpressibly; but the public profession, with its sense of irrevocableness, filled his heart with a grief for which he could find no single ray of comfort.

Erica's brave endurance of all the trials and discomforts involved in her change of faith had impressed him not a little, and even when most hurt and annoyed by her new views, he had always tried to shield her; but it had been a hard summer, and the loss of the home unity had tried him sorely.

Moreover, the comparative quiet of the last year was now ended. A new foe had arisen in the person of a certain retired cheesemonger, who had sworn war to the knife against the prophet of atheism. Unfortunately Mr. Pogson's war was not undertaken in a Christ-like spirit; his zeal was fast changing into personal animosity, and he had vowed that he would crush Raeburn, though it should cost him the whole of his fortune. This very day he had brought into action the mischievous and unfair blasphemy laws, and to everybody's amazement, had commenced a prosecution against Raeburn for a so-called 'blasphemous libel' in one of his recent pamphlets. An attack on the liberty of the press was to Raeburn what the sound of the trumpet is to the war-horse. Yet, now that the first excitement was over, he had somehow sunk into a fit of black depression. How was it? Was his strength failing? was he growing old—unfit for his work?

He was roused at length by a knock at his door. The servant entered with a number of letters. He turned them over mechanically until some handwriting which reminded him of

his mother's made him pause. The letter bore the Greyshot postmark; it must be from his sister Isobel. He opened it with some eagerness; there had been no communication between them since the time of his wife's death, and though he had hoped that the correspondence once begun might have been continued, nothing more had come of it. The letter proved short, and not altogether palateable. It began with rejoicings over Erica's change of views, the report of which had somehow reached Mrs. Fane-Smith. It went on to regret that he did not share in the change. Raeburn's lip curled as he read. Then came a request that Erica might be allowed to visit her relations, and the letter ended with a kindly-meant, but mistaken offer.

'My husband and I both feel that there are many objections to Erica's remaining in her present home. We should be much pleased if she would live with us—at any rate, until she has met with some situation which would provide her with a suitable and permanent residence.'

The offer was not intended to be insulting, but undoubtedly, to such a father as Raeburn,

it was a gross insult. His eyes flashed fire, and involuntarily he crushed the letter in his hand; then, a little ashamed of the passionate act, he forced himself deliberately to smooth it out again, and, folding it accurately, put it in his pocket. A note for Erica remained in the envelope; he placed it on the mantel-piece, then fell back in his chair again and thought.

After all, might not the visit to Greyshot be a very good thing for her? Of course she would never dream of living with her aunt, would indeed be as angry at the proposal as he had been. But might not a visit of two or three weeks open her eyes to her new position, and prove to her that among Christians such people as the Osmonds were only in the minority? He knew enough of society to be able to estimate the position it would accord to Erica. He knew that her sensitiveness would be wounded again and again, that her honesty would be shocked, her belief in the so-called Christian world shaken. Might not all this be salutary? And yet he did not like the thought; he could not bear sending her out alone to fight her own battles, could not endure the consciousness that

she was bearing his reproach. Oh, why had this miserable, desolating change ever occurred? At this very moment she was making public profession of a faith which could only place her in the most trying of positions; at this very moment she was pledging herself to a life of bondage and trouble; while he, standing aside, could see all the dangers and difficulties of her future, and could do absolutely nothing!

It reminded him of one of the most horrible moments of his life. Walking up Regent Street one afternoon, years ago, Erica, walking with Mrs. Craigie on the opposite side, had caught sight of him, and regardless of the fourfold chain of carriages, had rushed across to him with the fearless daring of a six years' old child, to whom the danger of horses' hoofs was a mere nothing when compared with the desire to get a walk with her father. His heart beat quicker even now as he thought of the paralysing dread of long ago, nor had Miss Erica ever been scolded for her loving rashness; in his relief he had been unable to do anything but clasp the little hand in his as though nothing should ever part them again.

But her loving disregard of all danger and difficulty was no longer inspired by love of him, but by love of what Raeburn considered a myth and a delusion.

In that lay the real sting. Her courage, her suffering all seemed to him wasted, altogether on the wrong side. Once more black gloom fell upon him. The room grew dusk—then dark, but still he remained motionless.

Again he was interrupted by a knock at his door.

'Signor Civita wished to speak to him.'

He braced himself up for an interview with some stranger, and in walked a foreigner wrapped in a long cloak, and looking exceedingly like a stage brigand.

He bowed, the brigand bowed too, and said something, rapid and unintelligible, in Italian. Then, glancing at the door to see that it was safely closed, he made a bound to the open window and shut it noiselessly. Raeburn quietly reached down a loaded revolver which hung above the mantelpiece, and cocked it, whereupon the brigand fell into a paroxysm of laughter, and exclaimed, in German,

'Why, my good friend! do you not know me?'

'Haeberlein!' exclaimed Raeburn, in utter amazement, submitting to a German embrace.

'Eric himself and no other!' returned the brigand. 'Draw your curtains and lock your door and you shall see me in the flesh. I'm half stifled in this lordly wig.'

'Wait,' said Raeburn. 'Be cautious.'

He left him for a minute, and Haeberlein heard him giving orders that no one else was to be admitted that evening. Then he came back, quietly bolted the door, closed the shutters, and lit the gas. In the meantime his friend threw off his cloak, removed the wig of long, dark hair and the drooping moustache and shaggy eyebrows, revealing his natural face and form. Raeburn grasped his hand once more.

'Now I feel that I've got you, Eric!' he exclaimed. 'What lucky chance has brought you so unexpectedly?'

'No lucky one!' said Haeberlein, with an expressive motion of the shoulders. 'But of that anon: let me look at you, old fellow—why, you're as white as a miller! call yourself six-and-forty! you might pass for my grandfather!'

Raeburn, who had a large reserve fund of humour, caught up his friend's black wig from the table and put it on above his own thick, white hair, showing plainly enough that in face and spirits he was as young as ever. It was seven years since they had met, and they fell to talking of reminiscences and in the happiness of their meeting put off the more serious matters which must be discussed before long. It was a good half-hour before Haeberlein alluded to the occasion of his present visit.

'Being actually in London, I couldn't resist looking in upon you,' he said, a cloud of care coming over his face. 'I only hope it won't get you into a scrape. I came over to try to avert this deplorable business about poor Kellner—too late, I fear. And, the worst of it is, I must have blundered somehow, for my coming leaked out, and they are on the watch for me. If I get safe across to France to-night, I shall be lucky.'

'Incautious as ever,' sighed Raeburn. 'And that Kellner richly deserves his fate. Why should you meddle?'

'I was bound to,' said Haeberlein. 'He did

me many a good turn during my exile, and, though he has made a grave mistake, yet——'

'Yet you must run your chivalrous head into a halter for his sake!' exclaimed Raeburn. 'You were ever a Quixote. I shall live to see you hanged yet.'

Haeberlein laughed.

'No, I don't think you will,' he said, cheerfully. 'I've had some bad falls, but I've always fallen on my feet. With a good cause, a man has little to fear.'

'If this *were* a good cause,' said Raeburn, with significant emphasis.

'It was the least I could do,' said Haeberlein, with the chivalrous disregard of self which was his chief characteristic. 'I only fear that my coming here may involve you in it—which heaven forefend! I should never forgive myself if I injured your reputation.'

Raeburn smiled rather bitterly.

'You need not fear that. My reputation has long been at the mercy of all the lying braggarts in the country. Men label me socialist one day, individualist the next. I become communist or egotist, as is most convenient to the

speaker and most damaging to myself. But there,' he exclaimed, regaining the tranquil serenity which characterised him, 'why should I rail at the world when I might be talking to you? How is my old friend Hans?'

The sound of a key in the latch startled them.

'It is only Erica,' said Raeburn. 'I had forgotten she was out.'

'My pretty little namesake! I should like to see her. Is she still a zealous little atheist?'

'No, she has become a Christian,' said Raeburn, speaking with some effort.

'So!' exclaimed Haeberlein, without further comment. He himself was of no particular creed; he was just indifferent, and the zeal of his friend often surprised him.

Raeburn went out into the passage, drew Erica into the front sitting-room, and closed the door.

'There is an old friend of yours in my study,' he said. 'He wishes to see you, but you must promise secresy, for he is in danger.'

'Is it Herr Haeberlein?' asked Erica.

'Yes, on one of his rash, kindly errands, but one of which I don't approve. However, his

work is over, and we must try to get him safely off to France. Come in with me if you will, but I wanted to tell you about it first, so that you should not be mixed up with this against your will, which would be unfair.'

'Would it?' said Erica, smiling, as she slipped her hand into his.

Haeberlein had taken a newspaper out of his pocket, and was searching for something. The gaslight fell on his clean-shaven face, revealing a sweet-tempered mouth, keen blue eyes, a broad German forehead, and closely-cropped, iron-grey hair. Erica thought him scarcely altered since their last meeting. He threw down his newspaper as she approached.

'Well, my *Herzblättchen!*' he exclaimed, saluting her with a double kiss, 'so you are not ashamed of your old friend? So,' holding her at arms' length and regarding her critically, 'lion-hearted as ever, I see, and ten thousand times prettier. *Potztausend!* the English girls do beat ours all to nothing. Well, my *Liebchen*, dost thou remember the day when thou carried the Casati despatches in thy geography-book under the very nose of a spy? It was a brave

deed that, and it saved a brave man's life.'

Erica smiled and coloured. 'I was not so brave as I seemed,' she said. 'My heart was beating so loud, I thought people must hear it.'

'Hast thou never heard the saying of the first Napoleon, "The bravest man is he who can conceal his fear"? I do not come under that category, for I never had fear—never felt it. Thou wouldst not dream, *Herzblättchen*, that spies are at this moment dogging my steps while I jest here with thee?'

'Is that indeed true?' exclaimed Erica.

They explained to her a little more of Haeberlein's errand and the risk he ran; he alluded to his hopes that Raeburn might not be involved in any unpleasant consequences. Erica grew pale at the bare suggestion.

'See,' exclaimed Haeberlein, 'the little one cares more for your reputation than you do yourself, my friend. See what it is to have a daughter who can be afraid for you, though she cannot be afraid for herself? But, *Liebchen*, thou must not blame me for coming to see him. Think!—my best friend, and unseen for seven years!'

'It is worth a good deal of risk,' said Erica, brightly. But as the terror of having her father's name mentioned in connection with Herr Kellner's once more returned to her, she added, pleadingly, 'And you *will* be careful when you leave the house!'

'Yes, indeed,' said Haeberlein. 'See what a disguise I have!'

He hastily donned the black wig, moustache, and eyebrows, and the long Italian cloak.

Erica looked at him critically.

'Art thou not satisfied?' he asked.

'Not a bit,' she said, promptly. 'In London everyone would turn to look twice at such a dress as that, which is what you want to avoid. Besides, those eyebrows are so outrageous, so evidently false.'

She thought for a minute.

'My brown Inverness,' suggested Raeburn.

'Too thick for a summer night,' said Erica, 'and,'—glancing from her father to Haeberlein—'too long to look natural. I think Tom's ulster and travelling-hat would be better.'

'Commend me to a woman when you want sound advice!' cried Haeberlein.

Erica went to search Tom's room for the ulster, and in the meantime Haeberlein showed his friend a paragraph in one of the evening papers which proved to Raeburn that the risk was indeed very great. They were discussing things much more gravely when Erica returned.

'The stations will be watched,' Haeberlein was saying.

'What station do you go to?' asked Erica.

'I thought of trying Cannon Street,' replied the German.

'Because,' continued Erica, 'I think you had better let me see you off. You will look like a young Englishman, and I shall do all the talking, so that you need not betray your accent. They would never dream of Herr Haeberlein laughing and talking with a young girl.'

'They would never dream that a young girl would be brave enough to run such a risk!' said Haeberlein. 'No, my sweet *Herzblättchen*, I could not bring thee into danger.'

'There will be none for me,' said Erica, 'and it may save you from evil and my father from suspicion. Father, if you will let me, it would be more of a disguise than anything.'

'You might meet some one you know,' said Raeburn.

'Very unlikely,' she replied. 'And even if I did, what would it matter? I need not tell them anything, and Herr Haeberlein would get off all the same.'

He saw that she was too pure and too unconventional to understand his objection, but his whole heart rebelled against the idea of letting her undertake the task, and it was only after much persuasion that she drew from him a reluctant consent. After all, it would be a great safe-guard to Haeberlein, and Haeberlein was his dearest friend. For no one else could he have risked what was so precious to him. There was very little time for discussion. The instant his permission was given, Erica ran upstairs to Tom's private den, lighted his gas-stove, and made a cup of chocolate, at the same time blackening a cork very carefully. In a few minutes she returned to the study, carrying the chocolate and a plate of rusks, which she remembered were a particular weakness of Herr Haeberlein's. She found that in her absence the two had been discussing matters again, for

Haeberlein met her with another remonstrance.

'*Liebe* Erica,' he began, 'I yielded just now to thy generous proposal; but I think it will not do. For myself I can be rash, but not for thee. Thou art too frail and lovely, my little one, to be mixed up with the grim realities of such a life as mine.'

She only laughed. 'Why, I have been mixed up with them ever since I was a baby!'

'True; but now it is different. The world might judge thee harshly, people might say things which would wound thee.'

'"They say! *Let* them say!"' quoted Erica, smiling. '*Mens conscia recti* will carry one through worse things than a little slander. No, no, you must really let me have my own way. It is right, and there's an end of it!'

Raeburn let things run their course; he agreed with Erica all the time, though his heart impelled him to keep her at home. And as to Eric Haeberlein, it would have needed a far stronger mind than that of the sweet-tempered, Quixotic German to resist the generous help offered by such a lovely girl.

There was no time to lose; the latest train for

the continent left at 9.25, and before Haeberlein had adjusted his new disguise the clock struck nine. Erica very carefully blackened his eyebrows, and ruthlessly sheared the long black wig to an ordinary and unnoticeable length, and, when Tom's ulster and hat were added, the disguise was so perfect, and made Haeberlein look so absurdly young, that Raeburn himself could not possibly have recognised him.

In past years Raeburn had often risked a great deal for his friend. At one time his house had been watched day and night in consequence of his well-known friendship with the Republican Don Quixote. Unfortunately, therefore, it was only too probable that Haeberlein in risking his visit this evening might have run into a trap. If he were being searched for, his friend's house would almost inevitably be watched.

They exchanged farewells not without some show of emotion on each side, and just at the last Raeburn hastily bent down and kissed Erica's forehead, at his heart a sickening sense of anxiety. She too was anxious, but she was very happy to have found on the evening of her baptism so unusual a service to render to her

father, and, besides, the consciousness of danger always raised her spirits.

When, as they had half expected, they found the would-be-natural-looking detective prowling up and down the *cul de sac*, it was no effort to her to begin at once a laughing account of a school examination which Charles Osmond had told her about, and so naturally and brightly did she talk that, though actually brushing past the spy under the full light of the street lamp, she entirely disarmed suspicion.

It was a horrible moment, however. Her heart beat wildly as they passed on, and every moment she thought she should hear quick steps behind them. But nothing came of it, and in a few minutes they were walking down Southampton Row. When this was safely passed, she began to feel comparatively at ease. Haeberlein thought they might take a cab.

'Not a Hansom,' she said, quickly, as he was on the point of hailing one. 'You would be so much more exposed, you know!'

Haeberlein extolled her common-sense, and they secured a four-wheeler and drove to Cannon Street.

Talking now became more possible. Haeberlein leant far back in the corner, and spoke in low tones.

'Thou hast been my salvation, Erica,' he said, pressing her hand. 'That fellow would never have let me pass in the Italian costume. Thou wert right as usual, it was theatrical,—how do you call,—stagey, is it not?'

'I am a little troubled about your mouth,' said Erica, smiling, 'the moustache doesn't disguise it, and it looks so good-tempered and like itself. Can't you feel severe just for half an hour?'

Haeberlein smiled his irresistibly sweet smile, and tried to comply with her wishes, but not very successfully.

'I think,' said Erica, presently, 'it will be the best way, if you don't mind, for you just to stroll through the booking office while I take your ticket. I can meet you by the bookstall and I will still talk for us both in case you betray your accent.'

'*Herzblättchen!*' exclaimed Haeberlein, 'how shall I ever repay thee! Thou art a real canny little Scot! I only wish I had half thy caution and forethought.'

'Don't look like that!' said Erica, laughing, as the benignant expression once more came over his lips. 'You really must try to turn down the corners! Your character is a silent, morose misanthrope. I am the chatterbox, pure and simple.'

They were both laughing when they drew near to the station, but a sense of the risk sobered Haeberlein, and Erica carried out her programme to perfection. It was rather a shock to her, indeed, to find a detective keenly inspecting all who went to the ticket office. He stood so close to the pigeon-hole that Erica doubted whether Herr Haeberlein's eyebrows, improved though they were, could possibly have escaped detection. It required all her self-command to prevent her colour from rising and her fingers from trembling as she received the ticket and the change under that steady scrutiny. Then she passed out on to the platform and found that Herr Haeberlein had been wise enough to buy the paper which least sympathised with his views, and in a few minutes he was safely disposed in the middle of a well-filled carriage.

Erica took out her watch. There were still

three minutes before the train started, three long, interminable minutes! She looked down the platform, and her heart died within her; for, steadily advancing towards them, she saw two men making careful search in every carriage.

Herr Haeberlein was sitting with his back to the engine. Between him and the door sat a lady with a copy of the *Graphic* on her knee. If she could only have been persuaded to read it, it might have made an effectual screen. She tried to will her to take it up, but without success. And still the detectives moved steadily forward with their keen scrutiny.

Erica was in despair. Herr Haeberlein imagined himself safe now, and she could not warn him without attracting the notice and rousing the suspicion of the passengers. To complete her misery, she saw that he had pushed his wig a little on one side, and through the black hair she caught a glimpse of silvery grey.

Her heart beat so fast that it almost choked her, but still she forced herself to talk and laugh, though every moment the danger drew nearer. At the very last moment, an inspiration came to

her. The detectives were examining the next carriage.

'They are taking things in the most leisurely way to-night!' she exclaimed. 'I'm tired of waiting. I shall say good-bye to you, and go home, I think.'

As she spoke, she opened the carriage-door, stepped in, and demonstratively kissed her silent companion, much to the amusement of the passengers, who had been a good deal diverted by her racy conversation and the grumpy replies of the traveller. There was a smile on every face when one of the detectives looked in. He glanced to the other side of the carriage, and saw a dark-haired young man in an ulster, and a pretty girl taking leave of her lover. Erica's face entirely hid Herr Haeberlein's from view, and the man passed on with a shrug and a smile. She had contrived to re-adjust his wig, and, with many last words, managed to spin out the remaining time, till at last the welcome signal of departure was given.

Haeberlein's mouth relaxed into a benignant smile, as he nodded a farewell; then he discreetly composed himself into a sleeping posture,

while Erica stood on the platform and waved her handkerchief.

As she moved away, the two detectives passed by her.

'Not there! at any rate,' she heard one of them say. 'Maybe they got him by the nine o'clock at Waterloo.'

'More likely trapped him in Guilford Terrace,' replied the other.

Erica, shaking with suppressed laughter, saw the men leave the station; and then, springing into a cab, drove to a street in the neighbourhood of Guilford Square.

Now that her work was over, she began to feel what a terrible strain it had been. At first she lay back in the corner of the cab in a state of dreamy peace, watching the gaslit streets, the hurrying passengers, with a comfortable sense of security and rest. But when she was set down near Guilford Square, her courage, which in real danger had never failed her, suddenly ebbed away, and left her merely a young girl, with aching back and weary limbs, with a shrinking dislike of walking alone so late in the evening. Worst of all, her old childish

panic had taken hold of her once more; her knees trembled beneath her, as she remembered that she must pass the spy, who would assuredly still be keeping watch in Guilford Terrace. The dread of being secretly watched had always been a torment to her. Spies, sometimes real, sometimes imaginary, had been the terror of her childhood—had taken the place of the ghost and bogey panics which assail children brought up in other creeds.

The fact was she had been living at very high pressure, and she was too much exhausted to conquer her unreasonable fright, which increased every moment, until she was on the point of going to the Osmonds, willing to frame any excuse for so late a visit, if only she could get one of them to walk home with her. Honesty and shame hindered her, however. With a great effort of will, she forced herself to pass the door, horrified to find how nearly selfish cowardice had induced her to draw her friends into suspicion. Echoes of the hymns sung at her baptism and at the subsequent confirmation rang in her ears. She walked on more bravely.

By the time she reached Guilford Terrace, she

had herself quite in hand. And it was well; for, as she walked down the dreary little alley, a dark form emerged from the shadow, and suddenly confronted her.

Anyone might reasonably be a little startled by having a sudden pause made before them by an unknown person on a dark night. Erica thought she could exactly sympathise with a shying horse; she felt very much inclined to swerve aside. Fortunately she betrayed no fear, only a little surprise, as she lifted her head and looked the man full in the face, then moved on with quiet dignity. She felt him follow her to the very door, and purposely she took out her latch-key with great deliberation, and allowed him, if he pleased, to take a quiet survey of the passage while she rubbed her boots on the mat; then, with a delicious sense of safety, she closed the door on the unfriendly gaze.

In the meantime, Raeburn had spent a miserably anxious evening, regretting his rash permission for Erica to go, regretting his own enforced inaction, regretting his well-known and undisguisable face and form, almost regretting that his friend had visited him. Like

Erica, he was only personally brave; he could not be brave for other people. Actual risk he would have enjoyed, but this anxious waiting was to him the keenest torture.

When at length the age-long hour had passed, and he heard the front door close, he started up with an exclamation of relief, and hurried out into the passage. Erica greeted him with her brightest smile.

'All safe,' she said, following him into the study. 'He is well on his way to Folkestone, and we have eluded three spies.'

Then, with a good deal of humour, she related the whole of the adventure, at the same time taking off her hat and gloves.

'And you met no one you knew?' asked Raeburn.

'Only the bishop who baptized and confirmed me this evening, and he of course did not recognise me.'

As she spoke, she unbuttoned her ulster, disclosing beneath it her white serge dress.

Raeburn sighed. Words and sight both reawakened a grief which he would fain have put from him.

But Erica came and sat down on the hearth-rug, and nestled up to him just as usual.

'I am so tired, *padre mio!*' she exclaimed. 'But it has been well worth it.'

Raeburn did not answer. She looked up in his face.

'What are you thinking?'

'I was thinking that few people had such an ending to their confirmation day,' said Raeburn.

'I thank God for it,' said Erica. 'Oh! father, there is so much, so very much, we still have in common! And I am so glad this happened to-night of all nights!'

He stroked her hair caressingly, but did not speak.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NEW RELATIONS.

> For all men live and judge amiss
> Whose talents jump not just with his.
>
> *Hudibras.*

> Comfortable moles, whom what they do
> Teaches the limit of the just and true,
> (And for such doing they require not eyes).
>
> MATTHEW ARNOLD.

ONE bright afternoon about a week after this, Erica found herself actually in the train, and on her way to Greyshot. At first she had disliked the idea, but her father had evidently wished her to accept the invitation, and a hope of uniting again the two families would have stimulated her to a much more formidable undertaking than a visit of a few weeks to perfect strangers. She knew nothing of the proposal made to her father; her own letter had been most kind, and

after all, though she did not like the actual leaving home, she could not but look forward to a rest and change after the long summer months in town. Moreover, Aunt Jean had just returned, after a brief holiday, and the home atmosphere for the last two or three days had been very trying; she felt as if a change would make her better able to bear the small daily frets and annoyances, and not unnaturally looked forward to the delicious rest of unity. A Christian home ought to be delightful; she had never stayed in one, and had a high ideal.

It was about six o'clock by the time she reached her journey's end, and, waiting for her on the platform, she had no difficulty in recognising her aunt, a taller and fairer edition of Mrs. Craigie, who received her with a kind, nervous, diffident greeting, and seemed very anxious indeed about her luggage, which was speedily brought to light by the footman, and safely conveyed to the carriage. Erica, used to complete independence, felt as if she were being transformed into a sort of grown-up baby, as she was relieved of her bag and umbrella, and guided down the steps, and assisted into

the open landau, and carefully tucked in with a carriage rug.

'I hope you are not over-tired with the journey?' inquired her aunt, with an air of the kindest and most anxious solicitude.

Accustomed to a really hard life in London, Erica almost laughed at the idea of being over-tired by such a short journey.

'Oh, I have enjoyed it, thank you,' she replied. 'What a lovely line it is!'

'Is it?' said her aunt, a little surprised. 'I didn't know it was considered specially pretty, and I myself am never able to look much at the scenery in travelling; it always gives me a headache.'

'What a pity!' said Erica. 'It is such a treat, I think. In fact, it is the only way in which I have seen what people call scenery. I never stayed in the country in my life.'

'My dear, is it possible!' exclaimed Mrs. Fane-Smith, in a horrified voice. 'Yet you do not look pale. Do you mean that you have spent your whole life in town?'

'I was at Paris for two years,' said Erica; 'and twice I have spent a little time at the sea-

side; and, years and years ago, father was once taken ill at Southampton, and we went to him there—that was almost like the country—I mean, one could get country walks. It was delightful; there is a splendid avenue, you know, and oh, such a common! It was in the spring-time. I shall never forget the yellow gorse and the hawthorns, and such beautiful velvety grass.'

Her enthusiasm pleased her aunt; moreover, it was a great relief to find the unknown niece well-bred and companionable, and not overburdened with shyness. Already Mrs. Fane-Smith loved her, and felt that the invitation, which she had given really from a strong sense of duty, was likely to give her pleasure instead of discomfort. All the way home, while Erica admired the Greyshot streets, and asked questions about the various buildings, Mrs. Fane-Smith was rejoicing that so fair a 'brand,' as she mentally expressed it, had been 'plucked from the burning,' and resolving that she would adopt her as a second daughter, and, if possible, induce her to adopt their name, and drop the notorious 'Raeburn.' The relief was great, for

on the way to the station Mrs. Fane-Smith had been revolving the unpleasant thought in her mind that 'Really there was no knowing, Erica might be "anything," since her mother was a "nobody."'

At last they drew up before a large house in the most fashionable of the Greyshot squares, the windows and balconies of which were gay with flowers.

'We shall find Rose at home, I expect,' said Mrs. Fane-Smith, leading Erica across a marble-paved hall; and even as she spoke a merry voice came from the staircase, and down ran a fair-haired girl, with a charmingly eager and *naïve* manner.

Erica had guessed what she must be from the quaint and kindly-meant letter which she had sent her years before, and though five years in society had somewhat artificialised Rose, she still retained much of her childishness and impetuous honesty. She slipped her arm into her cousin's, and took her off to her room at once.

'I am so glad you have come!' she exclaimed. 'I have been longing to see you for years and years. Mamma has been talking so much about

your cleverness and my stupidity that just at the last I felt quite in a fright lest you should be too dreadfully "blue." I looked out of the drawing-room window for you, and if you had been very forbidding, I should have received you in state in the drawing-room, but you were so charmingly pretty that I was obliged to rush down headlong to meet you.'

Erica laughed and blushed, not being used to such broad compliments. In the meantime, they had traversed several flights of stairs, and Rose, opening a door, showed her into a spacious bed-room, most luxuriously fitted up.

'This great big room for me!' exclaimed Erica.

'It isn't at all ghostly,' said Rose, reassuringly. 'Will you be afraid if you have a night-light?'

Erica laughed at the idea of being afraid; she was merely amused to think of herself established in such a palatial bed-room, such a contrast to her little book-lined room at home. There was a dainty little book-case here, however, with some beautifully bound books, and in another minute she was delightedly scanning their titles, and, with a joyous exclamation, had

caught up Browning's 'Christmas Eve and Easter Day,' when a sound of dismay from her cousin made her laughingly put it down again.

'Oh, dear me!' said Rose, in a despairing voice, 'I am afraid, after all, you are dreadfully blue. Fancy snatching up a Browning like that!'

Erica began to unlock her trunk.

'Do you want your things out?' said Rose. 'I'll ring for Gemma; she'll unpack for you.'

'Oh, thank you,' said Erica, 'I would much rather do it myself.'

'But it is nearly dinner-time, we are dining early this evening, and you will want Gemma to help you to dress.'

'Oh, no,' said Erica, laughing, 'I never had a maid in my life!'

'How funny,' said Rose, 'I shouldn't know what to do without one. Gemma does everything for me, at least everything that Elspeth will let her.'

'Is she Italian?' asked Erica.

'Oh, no, her name is really Jemima, but that was quite too dreadfully ugly, you know, and she is such a pretty girl.'

She chattered on while Erica unpacked and put on her white serge, then they went down to the drawing-room, where Erica was introduced to her host, a small elderly man, who looked as if Indian sun had partially frizzled him. He received her kindly, but with a sort of ceremonious stiffness which made her feel less perfectly at her ease than before, and after the usual remarks about the length of the journey and the beauty of the weather he relapsed into silence, surveying everyone from his arm-chair as though he were passing mental judgments on every foolish or trifling remark uttered. In reality, he was taking in every particular about Erica. He looked at her broad forehead, overshadowed by the thick smooth waves of short auburn hair; observed her golden-brown eyes which were just now as clear as amber; noted the creamy whiteness and delicate colouring of her complexion, which indeed defied criticism—even the criticism of such a critical man as Mr. Fane-Smith. The nose was perhaps a trifle too long, the chin too prominent, for ideal beauty, but greater regularity of feature could but have rendered less quaint, less powerful, and less

attractive the strangely winsome face. It was only the mouth which he did not feel satisfied with,—it added character to the face, but he somehow felt that it betokened a nature not easily led, not so gentle and pliable as he could have wished. It shut so very firmly, and the under-lip was a little thinner and straighter than the other and receded a little from it, giving the impression that Erica had borne much suffering, and had exercised great self-restraint.

Mrs. Fane-Smith saw in her a sort of miniature and feminine edition of the Luke Raeburn whom she remembered eight-and-twenty years before in their Scottish home. When Rose had gone into the back drawing-room to fetch her crewels, she drew Erica towards her, and, kissing her again, said in a low, almost frightened voice,

'You are very like what your father was.'

But just at that moment Mr. Fane-Smith asked some sudden question, and his wife, starting and colouring as though she had been detected in wrong-doing, hurriedly and nervously devoted herself to what seemed to Erica a distract-

ingly roundabout answer. By the time it was fairly ended, dinner was announced, and the strangeness of the atmosphere of this new home struck more and more upon Erica and chilled her a little. The massive grandeur of the old oak furniture, the huge oil paintings which she wanted really to study, the great silver candelabra, even the two footmen and the solemn old butler seemed to oppress her. The luxury was almost burdensome. It was a treat indeed to see and use beautiful glass and china, and pleasant to have beautiful fruit and flowers to look at, but Erica was a Bohemian and hated stiff ceremony. Her heart failed her when she thought of sitting down night after night to such an interminable meal.

Worse still, she had taken a dislike to her host. Her likes and dislikes were always characterised by Highland intensity, and something in her aunt's husband seemed to rub her the wrong way. Mr. Fane-Smith was a retired Indian judge, a man much respected in the religious world, and in his way a really good man; but undoubtedly his sympathies were narrow and his creed hard. Closely

entwined with much true and active Christianity he had allowed to spring up a choking overgrowth of hard criticism; of intolerance, of domineering dogmatism. He was one of those men who go about the world, trying, not to find points of union with all men, but ferreting out the most trifling points of divergence. He did this with the best intentions, no doubt, but as Erica's whole view of life, and of Christian life in particular, was the direct opposite of his, their natures inevitably jarred.

She knew that it was foolish to expect every Christian household to be equal to the Osmonds', but nevertheless a bitter sense of disappointment stole over her that evening. Where was the sense of restful unity which she had looked forward to? The new atmosphere felt strange, the new order of life —this luxurious easy life—was hard to comprehend.

To add to her dislike, Mr. Fane-Smith was something of an epicure and had a most fastidious palate. Now, Erica's father thought scarcely anything about what he ate—it was indeed upon record that he had once in a fit of absence dined

upon a plate of scraps intended for Friskarina, while engaged in some scientific discussion with the professor! Mr. Fane-Smith, on the other hand, though convinced that the motto of all atheists was 'Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die,' criticised his food almost as severely as he criticised human beings. The mulligatawny was not to his taste. The curry was too hot. He was sure the jelly was made with that detestable stuff gelatine; he wished his wife would forbid the cook to use it—if she had seen old horses being led into a gelatine manufactory as he had seen, she would be more particular!

Interspersed between these complaints was conversation which irritated Erica even more. It was chiefly about the sayings and doings of people whom she did not know, and the doings of some clergyman in a neighbouring town seemed to receive severe censure, for Mr. Fane-Smith stigmatised him as 'A most dangerous man, a Pelagian in disguise.' However, he seemed to be fond of labelling people with the names of old heresies; for, presently, when Rose said something about Mr. Farrant, her father replied, contemptuously,

'Everyone knows, my dear, that Mr. Farrant holds unorthodox views! Why, a few years ago he was an atheist, and now he's a mere Photinian!'

As no one but Mr. Fane-Smith had the faintest idea what a 'Photinian' meant, the accusation could neither be understood nor refuted. Mrs. Fane-Smith looked very uncomfortable, fearing that her niece might feel hurt at the tone in which 'He was an atheist,' had been spoken; and indeed Erica's colour did rise.

'Is that Mr. Farrant the member?' she asked.

'Yes,' replied her aunt, apprehensively. 'Do you know him?'

'Not personally, but I shall always honour him for the splendid speech he made last year on religious toleration,' said Erica.

Mr. Fane-Smith raised his eyebrows, for the same speech had made him most indignant. However, he began to realise that, before Erica could become a patient recipient of his opinions like his wife and daughter, he must root out the false ideas which evidently still clung to her.

'Mr. Farrant is no doubt a reformed character now,' he added. 'But he is far from orthodox!

far from orthodox! At one time I am told that he was one of the wildest young fellows in the neighbourhood, no decent person would speak to him, and though no doubt he means well, yet I could never have confidence in such a man.'

'I have heard a good deal about him from my friends the Osmonds,' said Erica, stimulated as usual to side with the abused. 'Mr. Osmond thinks him the finest character he ever knew.'

'Is that the clergyman you told me of?' interposed Mrs. Fane-Smith, anxious to turn the conversation.

But her husband threw in a question too.

'What, Charles Osmond, do you mean—the author of "Essays on Modern Christianity?"'

'Yes,' replied Erica.

'I don't know that he is much more orthodox than Mr. Farrant,' said Mr. Fane-Smith; 'I consider that he has Noetian tendencies.'

Erica's colour rose and her eyes flashed.

'I do not know whether he is what is called orthodox or not,' she said. 'But I do know that he is the most Christ-like man I ever met.'

Mr. Fane-Smith looked uncomfortable. He would name any number of heresies and heretics,

but, except at grace, it was against his sense of etiquette to speak the name of Christ at table. Even Rose looked surprised, and Mrs. Fane-Smith coloured, and at once made the move to go.

On the plea of fetching some work, Erica escaped to her own room and there tried to cool her cheeks and her temper; but the idea of such a man as Mr. Fane-Smith sitting in judgment on such men as Mr. Farrant and Charles Osmond had thoroughly roused her, and she went down still in a dangerous state—a touch would make her anger blaze up.

'Are you fond of knitting?' asked her aunt, making room for her on the sofa, and much relieved to find that her niece was not of the unfeminine 'blue' order.

'I don't really like any work,' said Erica, 'but, of course, a certain amount must be done, and I like to knit my father's socks.'

Mr. Fane-Smith, who had just joined them, took note of this answer, and it seemed to surprise and displease him, though he made no remark.

'Did he think that atheists didn't wear socks?

or that their daughters couldn't knit ?' thought Erica to herself, with a little resentful inward laugh.

The fact was that Mr. Fane-Smith saw more and more plainly that the niece whom his wife was so anxious to adopt was by no means his ideal of a convert. Of course he was really and honestly thankful that she had adopted Christianity, but it chafed him sorely that she had not exactly adopted his own views. He was a man absolutely convinced that there is but one form of truth (and an exceedingly narrow form he made it) for all mankind. He—Mr. Fane-Smith—had exactly grasped the whole truth, and whoever swerved to the right or to the left, if only by a hair's-breadth, was, he considered, in a dangerous and lamentable condition. Ah ! he thought to himself, if only he had had from the beginning the opportunity of influencing Erica, instead of that dangerously broad Charles Osmond ! It did not strike him that he *had* had the opportunity ever since his return to England, but had entirely declined to admit an atheist to his house. Other men had laboured, and he had entered into the fruit of

their labours, and not finding it quite to his taste, fancied that he could have managed much better.

There are few sadder things in the world than to see really good and well-intentioned men fighting for what they consider the religious cause with the devil's weapons. Mr. Fane-Smith would have been dismayed if anyone could have shown him that all his life he had been struggling to suppress unbelief by what was infinitely worse than sincere unbelief—denunciation often untrue, always unjust, invariably uncharitable. He would have been almost broken-hearted could he have known that his hard intolerance, his narrowness, his domineering injustice had not deterred one soul from adopting the views he abhorred, but had, on the contrary, done a great deal to drive into atheism those who were wavering. And this evening, even while lamenting that he had not been able to train up his niece exactly in the opinions he himself held, he was all the time trying her faith more severely than a whole regiment of atheists could have tried it.

The time passed heavily enough. When two

people in the room are unhappy and uncomfortable, a sense of unrest generally falls upon the other occupants. Rose yawned, talked fitfully about the gaieties of the coming week, worked half a leaf on an antimacassar, and sang three or four silly little coquettish songs which somehow jarred on everyone.

Mrs. Fane-Smith, feeling anxious and harassed, afraid alike of vexing her husband and offending her niece, talked kindly and laboriously. Erica turned the heel of her sock and responded as well as she could, her sensitiveness recoiling almost as much from the laboured and therefore oppressive kindness, as from the irritating and narrow censure which Mr. Fane-Smith dealt out to all the world.

Family prayers followed. It was the first time she had ever been present at such a household gathering, and the idea seemed to her a very beautiful one. But the function proved so formal and lifeless that it chilled her more than anything. Yet her relations were so very kind to her personally that she blamed herself for feeling disappointed, and struggled hard to pierce through the outer shell, which she knew

only concealed their real goodness. She knew, too, that she had herself to blame in part; her over-sensitiveness, her quick temper, her want of deep insight had all had their share in making that evening such a blank failure.

Mrs. Fane-Smith went with her into her bedroom to see that she had all she wanted. Though the September evening was mild, a fire blazed in the grate, much to Erica's astonishment. Not on the most freezing of winter nights had she ever enjoyed such a luxury. Her aunt explained that the room looked north, and, besides, she thought a fire was cheerful and homelike.

'You are very kind,' said Erica, warmly; 'but you know I mustn't let you spoil me, or I shall not be fit to go back to the home life, and I want to go home much more fit for it.'

Something in the spontaneous warmth and confidence of this speech cheered Mrs. Fane-Smith. She wished above all things to win her niece's love and confidence, and she wisely reserved her proposal as to the matter of a home for another time. It was necessary, however, that she should give Erica a hint as to the topics likely to irritate Mr. Fane-Smith.

'I think, dear,' she began, 'it would be as well if, when my husband and Rose are present, you are careful not to speak of your father. You won't mind my saying this; but I know it displeases my husband, and I think you will understand that there are objections—society, you know, and public opinion; we must consult it a little.'

Mrs. Fane-Smith grew nervous and incoherent, threw her arms round her niece's neck, kissed her most affectionately, and wished her good-night.

When she had left the room, Erica's repressed indignation blazed up. We fear it must be recorded that she fairly stamped with anger.

Wounded in her tenderest part, indignant at the insult to her father, ashamed of her own want of control, miserably perplexed by her new surroundings, it was long before she could compose herself. She paced up and down the richly-furnished room, struggling hard to conquer her anger. At length, by a happy impulse, she caught up her Prayer-book, checked her longing to walk rapidly to and fro, sat down on the Indian rug before the fire, and read the

evening psalm. It happened to be the thirty-seventh. Nothing could have calmed her so effectually as its tender exhortation, its wonderful sympathy with human nature. 'Fret not thyself, else shalt thou be moved to do evil. Put thou thy trust in the Lord, and be doing good. Put thy trust in Him, and He will bring it to pass.'

She closed the book, and sat musing, her anger quite passed away.

All at once she recollected old Elspeth, the nurse. Her father had charged her with many messages to the faithful old servant, and so had her aunt. She felt ashamed to think that she had been several hours in the house without delivering them. Rose's room was close to hers. She went out, and knocked softly at the door.

'I just came to see whether Elspeth was here,' she said, rather dismayed to find the candles out, and the room only lighted by the red glow from the fire.

Rose, who had had no temper to conquer, was already in bed.

'Still in your dress!' she exclaimed. 'I believe you've been at that Browning again.

But did no one come to help you? I sent Gemma.'

'I didn't want help, thank you,' said Erica. 'I only wanted to see Elspeth, because I have a message for her.'

'How conscientious you are!' said Rose, laughing. 'I always make a point of forgetting messages when I go from home! Well, you will find Elspeth in the little room on the next half-landing, the work-room. She was here not two minutes ago. Good night! Breakfast is at nine, you know: and they'll bring you a cup of tea when they call you.'

A little shyly, Erica made her way to the work-room, where Elspeth was tacking frilling into one of Rose's dresses. The old woman started up with a quick exclamation, when she appeared in the doorway.

'May I come in?' said Erica, with all the charm of manner which she had inherited from her father. ''Tis very late, but I didn't like to go to bed without seeing you.'

'I hope missie has everything she wants?' asked Elspeth, anxiously.

'Yes, indeed!' said Erica. 'All I want is to

see you, and to give you my father's love; to ask how you are. He and Aunt Jean have often told me about you. You have not forgotten them?'

'Forgotten! No, indeed!' cried old Elspeth. 'When I saw you at "Takin' the book," and saw you so like your poor father, I could have cried. You are Mr. Luke's bairn, and no mistake, my bonnie lassie! Ah, I mind the day well when he came to my room—the auld nursery in the parsonage, where I had reared him—and told me that master had ordered him out of the house. I pray God I may never again see a face look as his looked then!'

Tears started to her eyes at the recollection. Erica threw her arms round her neck, and kissed her.

'You love him still. I see you love him!' she exclaimed, all her feeling of isolation melting in the assurance of the old servant's sympathy.

So, after all, Erica had a maid in attendance; for Elspeth insisted on seeing her to bed, and, since they talked all the time about the old Scotch days, she was well content to renounce her independence for a little while.

But, whether because of the flickering firelight, or because of the strangeness of the great brass bedstead, with its silken hangings and many-coloured Indian rozai, Erica slept very little that night. Perhaps the long talk about her father's early days had taken too great a hold of her. At any rate, she tossed about very restlessly in her luxurious quarters, and when, for brief intervals, she slept, it was only to dream of her father taking leave of his Scottish home, and always he bore that flint-like face, that look of strong endurance and repressed passion which Elspeth had described, and which, in times of trouble and injustice, Erica had learnt to know so well.

CHAPTER IX.

LADY CAROLINE'S DINNER.

> The blank amaze of your haughty gaze,
> The cold surprise of patrician eyes.
>
> LEWIS MORRIS.

> But the paucity of Christians is astonishing, considering the number of them.
>
> LEIGH HUNT.

THE irritation, or, at any rate, the novelty of the luxury in the Fane-Smiths' household wore off after Erica had spent a few days at Greyshot. She became accustomed to the great rooms, and being artistic by nature and the reverse by education, she began very much to enjoy the pictures, the charming variety of foreign treasures, and particularly all the lovely things of Indian workmanship with which the drawing-room was crowded. The long, formal meals she learnt to endure. The absurdly large

retinue of servants ceased to oppress her; she used to amuse herself by speculating as to the political views of the men-servants! while the luxury of a daily drive with her aunt she very much appreciated.

But, though the mere externals were soon familiar enough, she found that every day increased the difficulty she felt in becoming accustomed to the atmosphere of this family. She had lived all her life with people who were overwhelmed with work, and in a home where recreation was only the rare concession to actual health. Here recreation seemed to be the business of life, while work for the public was merely tacked on as a sort of ornamental fringe.

Mr. Fane-Smith had, indeed, a few committee meetings to attend; Mrs. Fane-Smith visited her district once a fortnight, and distributed tracts, and kind words, and soup-tickets, and blanket-tickets, besides the most lavish gifts from her own purse. Rose, to please her mother, taught a class of little girls on Sunday afternoon—that is to say, she did *not* teach them, but she sat in a chair and heard them say

collects, and enforced orderly behaviour upon them, and read them a good little story-book. But these were merely rather tiresome duties which came in very often as provoking interruptions to the great business of life, namely, eating, drinking, dining out, giving dinners, or attending the endless succession of at homes, dances, musical evenings, amateur theatricals, with which Greyshot people tried to kill time.

As to taking any intelligent interest in the political world, no one seemed to dream of such a thing, except Mr. Fane-Smith, who read the paper at breakfast, and hurled anathemas at all the statesmen whom Erica had learnt to love and revere. It taxed her patience to the utmost to sit through the daily diatribe against Sir Michael Cunningham, her hero of heroes. But even the violent opposition seemed preferable to the want of interest shown by the others. Mrs. Fane-Smith had time to fritter away at least half-an-hour after breakfast in the most desultory conversation, the most fruitless discussion with Rose as to some detail of dress; but she always made the excuse that she

'had no time' to read the papers, and amused Erica not a little by asking her husband if 'anything particular had been happening lately,' when they were just starting for a dinner-party. Out of his little *rechauffé* of the week's news she probably extracted enough information to enable her to display that well-bred interest, that vague and superficial acquaintance with the subject which will pass muster in society, and which probably explains alike the very vapid talk and the wildly false accusations which form the staple of ordinary conversation.

Rose was even more perplexing. She was not only ignorant, but she boasted of her ignorance. Again and again Erica heard her deprecate the introduction of any public question.

'Oh, don't begin to talk of that!' she would exclaim. 'I know nothing about it, and never mean to know anything.'

Or there would be an imploring appeal.

'Why do you waste your time in talking politics when you have never told me a word about so-and-so's wedding?'

She occasionally read the *Court Circular*, and

was rather fond of one or two of the 'society' papers, from which she used to glean choice little paragraphs of personal gossip.

Once one of these papers gave Erica an uncomfortable experience. The elders of the party being out for the evening, Rose and Erica had the drawing-room to themselves, and Erica was really enjoying the rare novelty of talking with a girl of her own age. Rose, although the most arrant little flirt, was fond, too, of her girl-friends, and she really liked Erica, and enjoyed the fun of initiating her into all the mysteries and delights of society.

'How did you get your name?' she asked, suddenly. 'It is so pretty and so uncommon.'

'Oh,' said Erica, without thinking, 'I was called after my father's friend, Eric Haeberlein.'

'Eric Haeberlein!' exclaimed Rose. 'Why, I was reading something about him this afternoon. Here it is—look!' and, after searching the columns of her favourite 'society' paper, she pointed to the following paragraph:

'It is now known as a positive fact that the notorious Eric Haeberlein was actually in London last week in connection with the disgrace-

ful Kellner business. *On dit* that he escaped detection through the instrumentality of one of the fair sex, whose audacity outweighed her modesty.'

Erica could hardly have restrained her indignation had not two real dangers drawn off her attention from her own wounded feelings. Her father—was there any hateful hint that he was mixed up with Herr Kellner? She glanced anxiously down the page. No, at least that falsehood had not been promulgated. She breathed more freely, but there was danger still, for Rose was watching her, and feminine curiosity is hard to baffle.

'Did you know about it?' she asked.

Erica did not reply for a moment, but read on, to gain time; then she threw down the paper with an exclamation of disgust.

'How can you read such stuff?'

'Yes, but is that the Eric Haeberlein you were named after? Did he really come to London and escape?'

'There is only one Eric Haeberlein in the world that I know of,' said Erica. 'But I think, Rose, I was wrong and foolish to men-

tion him. I can't tell you anything about him, and, even if I could, there is my promise to Aunt Isobel. If I am not to talk to you about my father, I certainly ought not to talk about his friends.'

Rose acquiesced, and never suspected any mystery. She chattered on happily for the rest of the evening, brought down a great collection of old ball-cards, and with a sort of loving recollection described each very minutely, just as some old nurses have a way of doing with the funeral-cards of their deceased friends. This paved the way for a spontaneous confession that she really preferred Mr. Torn, the curate of St. Matthew's, to Captain Golightly, though people were so stupid, and would say she was in love with him just because they flirted a little sometimes. Rose had already imagined herself in love with at least a dozen people, and was quite ready to discuss every one of her flirtations, but she was disappointed to find that her cousin was either very reserved on the subject, or else had nothing to say.

Erica sat listening with a sort of wonder, not unmixed with disgust. Perhaps she might

have shown her disapprobation had she not been thankful to have the conversation diverted from the dangerous topic; besides, the cruel words were still rankling in her heart, and woven in with Rose's chatter she heard continually, 'whose audacity outweighed her modesty.' For the first time she fully understood why her father had so reluctantly consented to her scheme; she began to feel the sting which lay beneath the words, the veiled 'hint,' the implied evil, more wounding, more damaging than an outspoken lie. Now that she understood the ways of society better, she saw, too, that what had seemed to her an unquestionable duty would be regarded as a grave breach of custom and etiquette. She began to question herself. Had she been right? It mattered very little what the writer in a 'society' paper said of her, if she had done the really right thing. What had she done? To save her father's friend from danger, to save her father from unmerited suspicion, she had gone out late in the evening with a man considerably over fifty, whom she had known from her babyhood. He had, it is true, been in the disguise

of a young man. She had talked to him on the platform much as she would have talked to Tom, and to save his almost certain detection, had sprung into the carriage, thrown her arms round his neck, and kissed him. *Had* audacity outweighed her modesty? Why, all the time she had been thanking God for having allowed her to undertake the difficult task for her father on that particular evening. She had done it in the sight of God, and should she now make herself miserable because the world was wanting in that charity which 'thinketh no evil?' No, she had been right—of that she was certain. Nevertheless, she understood well enough that society would condemn her action, and would with a smile condone Rose's most outrageous flirtations.

The first week in a new place always seems long, and Erica felt as if she had been away from home for months by the time it was over. Everyone had been very kind to her so far, but except when she was playing lawn tennis she was somehow far from happy. Her happiest moments were really those which she spent in her own room before breakfast, writing; and

the *Daily Review* owed some very lively articles to the Greyshot visit. Beyond a sort of clan feeling for her aunt, and a real liking for Rose—who, in spite of her follies, was good-humoured and very loveable—she had not yet found one point of union with her new relations. Even possible topics of conversation were hard to find. They cared nothing for politics, they cared nothing for science, they were none of them book-lovers, and it was against their sense of etiquette to speak of anything but the externals of religion. Worst of all, any allusion to home matters, any mention of her father had to be avoided. Little was left but the mere gossip of the neighbourhood, which, except as a social study, could not interest Erica.

Greyshot was an idle place; the church seemed asleep, a drowsy indifference hung about the richer inhabitants, while the honest workers not unnaturally banded themselves together against the sleepily respectable Church-goers, and Secularism and one or two other 'Isms' made rapid advances. Then sleepy orthodoxy lifted its drowsy head for a minute, noted the evil, and abused Mr. Raeburn and his fellow-

workers, lamenting in many-syllabled words the depravity of the working classes and the rapid spread of infidelity. But nothing came of the lament; it never seemed to strike them that they must act as well as talk, that they must renounce their useless, wasteful, unChristian lives before they had even a right to lift up their voice against Secularism, which certainly did in some measure meet the needs of the people. It never seemed to strike them that *they* were the real promoters of infidelity,—that they not only dishonoured the name of Christ, but by their inconsistent lives disgusted people with Christianity, and then refused to have anything more to do with them. Luke Raeburn, if he pulled down with the one hand, at any rate tried hard to build up with the other; but the people of Greyshot caused in a great degree the ruin and downfall, and then exclaimed 'How shocking!' and turned their backs, thinking to shift their blame on to the Secularist leaders.

As far as society goes, they succeeded in thus shifting the blame; the world laid it all on Luke Raeburn, he was a most convenient scape-goat,

and—so widely does conventional Christianity differ from the religion founded by Christ—it soon became among a certain set almost equivalent to a religious act to promulgate bits of personal scandal about him, flavoured of course with wordy lamentations as to the views he entertained. Thus, under the name of defenders of religion, conventional Christians managed to appear very proper and orthodox, and at the same time to dispose comfortably of all their sense of responsibility. There was a meanness about their way of doing it which might have made the very angels weep! Happily the judgments of society are not the judgments of God.

One of the leaders of society was a certain Lady Caroline Kiteley; she was a good-natured hospitable creature, very anxious that everyone should enjoy life, and a great favourite with all the young people, because she made much of them and gave delightful dances. The elders, too, liked her, and were not oblivious to the fact that she was the daughter of an earl, and the widow of a distinguished general. Erica had seen her more than once during her fiisit,

and had been introduced to her by Mrs. Fane-Smith, as 'my niece.'

Now, it happened that Mr. and Mrs. Fane-Smith and Rose were to dine with Lady Caroline the week after Erica's arrival. On the very day of the dinner-party, however, Rose was laid up with a bad cold, and her mother was obliged to write and make her excuses. Late in the afternoon there came in reply one of Lady Caroline's impulsive notes.

'DEAR MRS. FANE-SMITH.

'Scold that silly daughter of yours for catching cold; give her my love, and tell her that I was counting on her very much. Please bring your pretty niece instead.

'Yours sincerely,

'CAROLINE KITELEY.'

Mrs. Fane-Smith was glad and sorry at the same time, and very much perplexed. Such a peremptory but open-hearted invitation could not be declined, yet there were dangers in the acceptance. If Erica's name should transpire, it might be very awkward, but she had not broached the suggested change of name to her,

and every day her courage dwindled—every day that resolute mouth frightened her more. She was quite aware that Erica's steady courageous honesty would unsparingly condemn all her small weaknesses and little expedients.

Erica, when told of the invitation, was not particularly anxious to go, for she and Rose had been planning a cosy evening at home over a new novel upon which their tastes really agreed. However, Rose assured her that Lady Caroline's parties were always delightful, and hunted her off to dress at least an hour before there was any necessity. Rose was a great authority on dress, and, when her cousin returned, began to study her attire very critically.

She wore a very simply-made dress of moss-green velveteen, high to the throat, and relieved by a deep falling collar of old point. Elspeth had brought her a spray of white Banksia roses, but otherwise she wore no ornament. Her style was very different from her cousin's; but Rose could not help approving of it, its severity suited Erica.

'You look lovely!' she exclaimed. 'Lady Caroline will quite lose her heart to you! I think you should have that dress cut low in front, though. It is a shame not to show such a pretty neck as you must have.'

'Oh! no,' said Erica, quickly; 'father can't endure low dresses.'

'One can't always dress to please one's father,' said Rose. 'For the matter of that, I believe papa doesn't like them; but I always wear them. You see it is more economical, one must dress much more expensively if one goes in for high dresses. A little display of neck and arms, and any old rag will look dressy and fashionable, and though I don't care about economy, mamma does.'

'You don't have an allowance, then?'

'No; papa declared I ought to dress on eighty pounds a year, but I never could make both ends meet, and I got a tiresome long bill at Langdon's, and that vexed him, so now I get what I like, and mamma pays.'

Erica made no comment, but was not a little amazed. Presently Mrs. Fane-Smith came in, and seemed well pleased with her niece's appearance.

'You have the old point!' she exclaimed.

'Aunt Jean gave it me,' said Erica. 'She never would part with it because it was grandmamma's—at least, she did sell it once, when father was ill years ago, and we were at our wit's end for money, but she got it back again before the end of the year.'

Mrs. Fane-Smith coloured deeply, partly at the idea of her mother's lace being taken to a pawnbroker's, partly to hear that her brother and sister had ever been reduced to such straits. She made an excuse to take Erica away to her room, and there questioned her more than she had yet done about her home.

'I thought your father was so strong,' she said. 'Yet you speak as if he had had several illnesses.'

'He has,' replied Erica. 'Twice I can remember the time when they thought him dying, besides after the riot last year. Yes, he is strong; but, you see, he has such a hard life. It is bad enough now, and I doubt if anyone knows how fearfully he over-worked himself during the year in America. The other day I had to look something up in his diary for him,

and not till then did I find out how terribly he must have taxed his strength. On an average, he got one night's rest in the week, on the others he slept as well as he could in the long cars, which are wretchedly uncomfortable; the sleeping-cars being expensive, he wouldn't go in them.'

Mrs. Fane-Smith sighed. Her brother was becoming more of a living reality to her; she thought of him less as a type of wickedness. The recollection, too, that she had been all her life enjoying the money which he and her sister Jean had forfeited by their opinions, made her grieve the more over the little details of poverty and privation. Old Mr. Raeburn had left all his money to her, bequeathing to his other daughter and to his reprobate son the sum of one shilling, with the hope that heaven would bring them to a better mind. It was some comfort to learn from Erica that at last the terrible load of debt had been cleared off, and that they were comparatively free from trouble just at present.

With these thoughts in her mind, Mrs. Fane-Smith found herself on her way to Lady Caro-

line's; but her developing breadth of view was destined to receive a severe shock. They were the last guests to arrive, and at the very moment of their entrance Lady Caroline was talking in her most vivacious way to Mr. Cuthbert, a young clergyman, the vicar of one of the Greyshot churches.

'I am going to give you a treat, Mr. Cuthbert,' she said, laughingly. 'I know you are artistic, and so I intend you to take down that charming niece of Mrs. Fane-Smith's. I assure you she is just like a Burne-Jones angel.'

Mr. Cuthbert smiled a quietly superior smile, and coolly surveyed Erica as she came in. Dinner was announced almost immediately, and it was not until Mrs. Fane-Smith had been taken down that Lady Caroline brought Mr. Cuthbert to Erica's side to introduce him.

'Why, your aunt has never told me your name,' she said, smiling.

'My name is Erica Raeburn,' said Erica, quite unconscious that this was a revelation to everyone, and that her aunt had purposely spoken of her everywhere as 'my niece.'

Lady Caroline gave a scarcely perceptible

start of surprise, and there was a curious touch of doubt and constraint in her voice as she pronounced the 'Mr. Cuthbert—Miss Raeburn.' Undoubtedly that name sounded rather strangely in her drawing-room, and awoke uncomfortable suggestions.

'Raeburn!—Erica Raeburn!' thought Mr. Cuthbert to himself. 'Uncommon name in England. Connection, I wonder! Aunt hadn't given her name! That looks odd. I'll see if she has a Scotch accent.'

'Are you staying in Greyshot?' he asked, as they went down the broad staircase with its double border of flowering plants.

'Yes,' said Erica; 'I came last week. What lovely country it is about here!'

'Country,' with its trilled 'r,' betrayed her nationality, though her accent was of the slightest. Mr. Cuthbert chuckled to himself, for he thought he had caught Mrs. Fane-Smith tripping, and he was a man who derived an immense amount of pleasure from making other people uncomfortable. As a child, he had been a tease; as a big boy, he had been a bully; as a man, he had become a malicious gossip-

monger. To-night he thought he saw a chance of good sport, and directly he had said grace, in the momentary pause which usually follows, he turned to Erica with an abrupt, though outwardly courteous question, carried off with a little laugh.

'I hope you are no relation to that despicable infidel who bears your name, Miss Raeburn?'

Erica's colour deepened; she almost annihilated him with a flash from her bright indignant eyes.

'I am Luke Raeburn's daughter,' she said, in her clearest voice, and with a dignity which, for the time, spoilt Mr. Cuthbert's enjoyment.

Many people had heard the vicar's question during the pause, and not a few listened curiously for the answer which, though quietly spoken, reached many ears, for nothing gives so much penetrating power to words as concentrated will and keen indignation. Before long everyone in the room knew that Mrs. Fane-Smith's pretty niece was actually the daughter of 'that evil and notorious Raeburn.'

Mr. Cuthbert had certainly got his malicious wish; he had succeeded in making Mrs. Fane-

Smith miserable, in making his hostess furious, in putting his little neighbour into the most uncomfortable of positions. Of course he was not going to demean himself by talking to 'that atheist's daughter.' He enjoyed the general discomfiture to his heart's content, and then devoted himself to the lady on his other side.

As for Erica, her blood was up. Forced to sit still, forced even to eat at a table where she was an unwelcome guest, her anger got the mastery of her for the time. She was indignant at the insult to her father, indignant, too, that her aunt had ever allowed her to get into such a false position. The very constraint she was forced to put upon herself made her wrath all the deeper. She was no angel yet, though Mr. Burne Jones might have taken her for a model. She was a quick-tempered little piece of humanity; her passions burnt with Highland intensity, her sense of indignation was strong and keen, and the atmosphere of her home, the hard struggle against intolerable bigotry and malicious persecution had from her very babyhood tended to increase this. She had inherited all her father's passion for justice, and much of his

excessive pride, while her delicate physical frame made her far more sensitive. Moreover, though since that June morning in the museum she had gained a peace and happiness of which in the old days she had never dreamed, yet the entire change had in many ways increased the difficulties of her life. Such a wrench, such an upheaval as it had involved, could not but tell upon her immensely. And, besides, she had in every way for the last three months been living at high pressure.

The grief, the disapproval, the contemptuous pity of her Secularist friends had taxed her strength to the utmost, but she had stood firm, and had indeed been living on the heights. Now the months of Charles Osmond's careful preparation were over, her baptism was over, and a little weary and overdone with all that she had lived through that summer, she had come down to Greyshot expecting rest, and behold, fresh vexations had awaited her!

A nice Christian world! A nice type of a clergyman! she thought to herself, as bitterly as in the old days, and with a touch of sorrow

added. The old lines from 'Hiawatha,' which had been so often on her lips, now rang in her head,

> 'For his heart was hot within him,
> Like a living coal his heart was.'

She longed to get up and go, but that would have put her aunt into a yet more painful position, and might have annoyed Lady Caroline even more than her presence. She would have given anything to have fainted after the convenient fashion of the heroines of romance, but never had she felt so completely strung-up, so conscious of intense vitality. There was nothing for it but endurance. And for two mortal hours she had to sit and endure! Mr. Cuthbert never spoke to her; her neighbour on the other side glanced at her furtively from time to time, but preserved a stony silence; there was an uncomfortable cloud on her hostess's brow; while her aunt, whom she could see at some distance on the other side of the table, looked very white and wretched.

It is wonderful how rude people can be, even in good society, and the looks of 'blank

amaze,' 'cold surprise,' and cool curiosity which Erica received would hardly be credited. A greater purgatory to a sensitive girl, whose pride was by no means conquered, can hardly be conceived.

She choked down a little food, unable to reject everything, but her throat almost refused to swallow it. The glare of the lights, the oppressive atmosphere, the babel of tongues seemed to beat upon her brain, and a sick longing for home almost overmastered her. Oh, to get away from these so-called Christians, with their cruel judgments, their luxuries, their gaieties,—these hard, rich bigots, who yet belonged to the body she had just joined, with whom, in the eyes of her old friends, she should be identified! Oh, for the dear old book-lined study at home! for one moment with her father! one word from a being who loved and trusted her! Tears started to her eyes, but the recollection that even home was no longer a place of refuge checked them. There would be Aunt Jean's wearing remonstrances and sarcastic remarks; there would be Mr. Masterman's patronising contempt, and Tom's studious

avoidance of the matters she had most at heart. Was it worse to be treated as a well-meaning idiot, or as an outcast and semi-heretic? Never till now had she so thoroughly realised her isolation, and she felt so bruised and buffeted and weary that the realisation at that particular time was doubly trying.

Isolation is perhaps the greatest of all trials to a sensitive and warm-hearted nature, and nothing but the truest and deepest love for the whole race can possibly keep an isolated person from growing bitter. Erica knew this, had known it ever since Brian had brought her the message from her mother, 'It is only love that can keep from bitterness.' All through these years she had been struggling hard, and though there had been constant temptations, though the harshness of the bigoted, the insults offered to her father in the name of religion, the countless slights and slanders had tried her to the utmost, she had still struggled upward, and in spite of all had grown in love. But now for the first time she found herself completely isolated. The injustice, the hardness of it proved too much for her. She forgot

that those who would be peace-makers—reconcilers, must be content to receive the treatment which the Prince of Peace received; she forgot that these rich contemptuous people were her brothers and sisters, and that their hard judgment did not and could not alter their relationship; she forgot all in a burning indignation, in an angry revolt against the injustice of the world.

She would study these people, she would note all their little weaknesses and foibles! Mr. Bircham had given her *carte blanche* for these three weeks; she would write him a deliciously sarcastic article on modern society. The idea fired her imagination, she laughed to herself at the thought; for, however sad the fact, it is nevertheless true that to ordinary mortals 'revenge is sweet.' Had she given herself time to think out matters calmly, she would have seen that both Christianity and the rules of art were opposed to her idea. It is true that Michael Angelo and other painters used to revenge themselves on the cardinals or enemies they most hated by painting them in the guise of devils, but

both they and their art suffered by such a concession to an animal passion. And Erica fell grievously that evening. This is one of the evils of social ostracism. It is unjust, unnatural, and selfish. To preserve what it considers the dignity of society, it drives human beings into an unnatural position; it fosters the very evils which it denounces. And society is grossly unfair. A word, a breath, a false libel in a newspaper is quite sufficient. It will never trouble itself to inquire minutely into the truth, but will pronounce its hasty judgment, and then ostracise!

Erica began to listen attentively to the conversation, and it must be owned that it was not very edifying. Then she studied the faces and manners of her companions, and, being almost in the middle of the table, she had a pretty good view. Every creature she studied maliciously, keenly, sarcastically, until she came to the end of the table, and there a most beautiful face brought her back to herself for a minute with a sort of shock. Where had she seen it before? A strong manly face of the Roman type, clean-shaven, save for a very slight mous-

tache, which did not conceal the firm yet sensitive mouth; dark eyes, which even as she wondered met hers fully for an instant, and gave her a strange feeling of protection. She knew that at least one person in the room did not shudder at the idea of sitting at table with Luke Raeburn's daughter.

Better thoughts returned to her, she grew a little ashamed of her malice, and began to wonder who that ideal man could be. Apparently he was one of the distinguished guests, for he had taken down Lady Caroline herself. Erica was just too far off to hear what he said, and in another moment she was suddenly recalled to Mr. Cuthbert. He was talking to the old gentleman on her left hand, who had been silently surveying her at intervals as though he fancied she could not be quite human.

'Have you been following this Kellner trial?' asked Mr. Cuthbert. 'Disgraceful affair, isn't it?'

Then followed references to Eric Haeberlein, and veiled hints about his London friends and associates—more dangerous to the country than any foreigners, 'traitors, heady, high-minded,'

etc., etc. Such evil-doers always managed to keep within the letter of the law; but, for his part, he thought they deserved to be shut up, more than most of those who got penal servitude for life!

Erica's wrath blazed up again. Of course the veiled hints were intended to refer to her father, and the cruelty and insolence of the speaker—who knew that she understood his allusions—scattered all her better thoughts. It required a strong effort of will to keep her anger and distress from becoming plainly visible. Her unwillingness to give Mr. Cuthbert such a gratification could not have strengthened her sufficiently, but love and loyalty to her father and Eric Haeberlein had carried her through worse ordeals than this.

She showed no trace of embarrassment, but moved a very little further back in her chair, implying by a sort of quiet dignity of manner that she thought Mr. Cuthbert exceedingly ill-mannered to talk across her.

Feeling that his malicious endeavour had entirely failed, and stung by her dignified disapproval, Mr. Cuthbert struck out vindictively.

Breaking the silence he had maintained towards her, he suddenly flashed round upon her with a question.

'I suppose you are intimately acquainted with Eric Haeberlein?'

He tried to make his tone casual and seemingly courteous, but failed.

'What makes you suppose that?' asked Erica, in a cool, quiet voice.

Her perfect self-control, and her exceedingly embarrassing counter-question, quite took him aback. At that very minute, too, there was the pause, and the slight movement, and the glance from Lady Caroline which reminded him that he was the only clergyman present, and had to return thanks. He bent forward, and went through the usual form of 'For what we have received,' though all the time he was thinking of the 'counter-check quarrelsome' he had received from his next-door neighbour. When he raised his head again, he found her awaiting his answer, her clear, steady eyes quietly fixed on his face with a look which was at once sad, indignant, and questioning.

His question had been an insulting one. He

had meant it to prick and sting, but it is one thing to be indirectly rude, and another to give the 'lie direct.' Her quiet return question, her dignity, made it impossible for him to insult her openly. He was at her mercy. He coloured a little, stammered something incoherent about 'thinking it possible.'

'You are perfectly right,' replied Erica, still speaking in her quietly dignified voice. 'I have known Herr Haeberlein since I was a baby, so you will understand that it is quite impossible for me to speak with you about him after hearing the opinions you expressed just now.'

For once in his life Mr. Cuthbert felt ashamed of himself. He did not feel comfortable all through dessert, and gave a sigh of relief when the ladies left the room.

CHAPTER X.

A FRIEND.

> Then, my friend, we must not regard what the many say of us; but what he, the one man who has understanding of just and unjust, will say, and what the truth will say. And therefore you begin in error when you suggest that we should regard the opinion of the many about just and unjust, good and evil, honourable and dishonourable.
>
> PLATO.

IN the drawing-room Erica found the ostracism even more complete and more embarrassing. Lady Caroline, who was evidently much annoyed, took not the slightest notice of her, but was careful to monopolise the one friendly-looking person in the room, a young married lady in pale blue silk. The other ladies separated into groups of twos and threes, and ignored her existence. Lady Caroline's little girl, a child of twelve, was well-bred enough to come towards

her with some shy remark, but her mother called her to the other side of the room quite sharply, and made some excuse to keep her there, as if contact with Luke Raeburn's daughter would have polluted her.

A weary half-hour passed. Then the door opened and the gentlemen filed in. Erica, half angry, half tired, and wholly miserable, was revolving in her brain some stinging sentences for her article when the beautiful face again checked her. Her 'Roman,' as she called him, had come in, and was looking round the room, apparently searching for someone. At last their eyes met, and, with a look which said as plainly as words—'Oh, there you are! it was you I wanted,' he came straight towards her.

'You must forgive me, Miss Raeburn, for dispensing with an introduction,' he said; 'but I hardly think we shall need any except the name of our mutual friend, Charles Osmond.'

Erica's heart gave a bound. The familiar name, the consciousness that her wretched loneliness was at an end, and above all, the instantaneous perception of the speaker's nobility and breadth of mind, scattered for the time

all her resentful thoughts—made her again her best self.

'Then you must be Donovan!' she exclaimed, with the quaint and winsome frankness which was one of her greatest charms. 'I knew—I was sure you were not like other people.'

He took her hand in his and no longer wondered at Brian's seven years' hopeless waiting. But Erica began to realise that her exclamation had been appallingly unconventional, and the beautiful colour deepened in her cheeks.

'I beg your pardon,' she said, remembering with horror that he was not only a stranger but an M.P., 'I—I don't know what made me say that, but they have always spoken of you by your Christian name, and you have so long been "Donovan" in my mind that—somehow it slipped out—you didn't feel like a stranger.'

'I am glad of that,' he said, his dark and strangely powerful eyes looking right into hers. Something in that look made her feel positively akin to him. Like a stranger! Of course he had not felt like one! Never could be like anything but a friend! 'You see,' he continued, 'we have known of each other for years, and we

know that we have one great bond of union which others have not. Don't retract the "Donovan"—I like it. Let it be the outward sign of the real and unusual likeness in the fight we have fought.'

She still half hesitated. He was a man of five and thirty, and she could not get over the feeling that her impulsive exclamation had been presumptuous. He saw her uncertainty, and perhaps liked her the better for it, though the delicious naturalness, the child-like recognition of a real though scarcely known friend, had delighted him.

'We are a little more brother and sister than the rest of the world,' he said, with the chivalrous manner which seemed to belong naturally to his peculiarly noble face. 'And if I were to confess that I had not always thought of you as "Miss Raeburn"——'

He paused, and Erica laughed. It was absurd to stand on ceremony with this kindred spirit.

'Have you seen the conservatory?' he asked. 'Shall we come in there? I want to hear all about the Osmonds.'

The relief of speaking with one who knew

and loved Charles Osmond, and did not, for want of real knowledge, brand him with the names of half-a-dozen heresies, was very great. It was not for some time that Erica even glanced at the lovely surroundings, though she had inherited Raeburn's great love of flowers. At last, however, an exquisite white flower attracted her notice, and she broke off in the middle of a sentence.

'Oh, how lovely! I never saw anything like that before. What is it?'

'It is the *eucharis amazonica*,' replied her companion. 'About the most exquisite flower in the world, I should think—the "dove flower," as my little ones call it. If you look at it from a distance, the stamens really look like doves bending down to drink.'

'It is perfect! How I wish my father could see it!'

'We have a fairly good one at Oakdene, though not equal to this. We must persuade you and Mr. Raeburn to come and stay with us some day.'

The tears came into Erica's eyes, so great was the contrast between this friendliness and

the chilling discourtesy she had met with from others that evening.

'You are very good,' she said. 'If you only knew how hard it is to be treated as if one were a sort of semi-criminal!'

'I do know,' he said. 'It was this very society which goaded me into a sort of wild rebellion years ago. I deserved its bad opinion in a measure, and you do not, but it was unfair enough to make one pretty desperate.'

'If they were actual saints, one might endure it,' cried Erica. 'But to have such a man as my father condemned just on hearsay by people who are living lazy wasteful lives is really too much! I came to Greyshot expecting at least unity, at least peace in a Christian atmosphere, and *this* is what I get!'

Donovan listened in silence, a great sadness in his eyes. There was a pause; then Erica continued:

'You think I speak hotly. I cannot help it. I think I do not much mind what they do to me, but it is the injustice of the thing that makes one wild, and worst of all the knowing that this is what drives people into atheism—

this is what dishonours the name of Christ.'

'You are right,' he replied, with a sigh—'that *is* the worst of it. I have come to the conclusion that to be tolerant to the intolerant is the most difficult thing in life.'

'You must have plenty of practice in this dreadful place,' said Erica.

He smiled a little.

'Why, to be seen talking to me will make people say all sorts of evil of you,' she added. 'I wish I had thought of that before.'

'You wouldn't have spoken to me?' asked Donovan, laughing. 'Then I am very glad it didn't occur to you. But about that you may be quite easy—nothing could make them think much worse of me than they do already. I began life as the black sheep of the neigbourhood, and it is easier for the Ethiopian to change his skin than for a man to live down the past in public opinion. I shall be, at any rate, the dusky grey sheep of the place to the end of my life.'

There was no bitterness, no shade of complaint in his tone; he merely stated a fact. Erica was amazed; she knew that he was about

the only man who attempted to grapple with the evil and degradation and poverty of Greyshot.

'You see,' he continued, with the bright look which seemed to raise Erica into a purer atmosphere, 'it is not the public estimation which makes a man's character. There is one question which I think we ought never to ask ourselves, and that is, "What will people think of me?" It should be instead, "How can I serve?"'

'But, if they take away your power, how can you serve?'

'They can't take it away; they may check and hinder for a time, that is all. I believe one may serve always and everywhere.'

'You don't mean that I can serve that roomful of enemies in there?'

'That is exactly what I do mean,' he answered, smiling a little.

In the meantime, Lady Caroline was apologising to Mr. Cuthbert.

'I don't know when I have been so vexed!' she exclaimed. 'It is really too bad of Mrs. Fane-Smith. I had no idea that the Burne-

Jones angel I promised you was the daughter of that disgraceful man. What a horrible satire, is it not?'

'Pray, don't apologise,' said Mr. Cuthbert. 'It was really rather amusing than otherwise, and I fancy the young lady will be in no great hurry to force her way into society again.'

He laughed a soft, malicious, chuckling laugh.

'I should hope not, indeed,' said Lady Caroline, indignantly. 'Where has she disappeared to?'

'Need you ask?' said Mr. Cuthbert, smiling. 'Our revered member secured her at once, and has been talking to her in the conservatory for at least half-an-hour, hatching radical plots, I daresay, and vowing vengeance on all aristocrats.'

'Really it is too shocking!' said Lady Caroline. 'Mr. Farrant has no sense of what is fitting; it is a trait which I have always noticed in Radicals. He ought, at least, to have some respect for his position.'

'Birds of a feather flock together,' suggested Mr. Cuthbert, with his malicious smile.

'Well, I don't often defend Mr. Farrant,' said

Lady Caroline. 'But he comes of a good old family, and, though a Radical, he is at least respectable.'

Lady Caroline knew absolutely nothing about Erica, but uttered the last sentence, with its vague, far-reaching, and most damaging hint, without even a pricking of conscience.

'You will try to rescue the M.P.?' asked Mr. Cuthbert.

'For the sake of his position, yes,' said Lady Caroline, entering the conservatory.

'Oh! Mr. Farrant,' she said, with her most gracious smile, 'I came to see whether you couldn't induce your wife to sing to us. Now, is it true that she has given up her music? I assure you she and I have been battling the point ever since you came up. Can't you persuade her to give us just one song? I am really in despair for some music.'

'I am afraid my wife is quite out of voice,' said Donovan. 'Are there no other musical people?'

'Not one. It is really most astonishing. I was counting on Miss Fane-Smith, but she has disappointed me, and there is not another crea-

ture who will play or sing a note. Greyshot is a terribly unmusical place.'

'You do not belong to Greyshot, so perhaps you may be able to come to the rescue,' said Donovan to Erica. 'Scotch people can, at any rate, always play or sing their own national airs as no one else can.'

Lady Caroline did not really in the least care whether there were music or not, but she had expressed herself very strongly, and that tiresome Mr. Farrant had taken her at her word, and was trying to beat-up recruits—recruits that she did not want. He had now, whether intentionally or not, put her in such a position that, unless she were positively rude, she must ask Erica to play or sing.

'Have you brought any music, Miss Raeburn?' she asked, turning to Erica with a chilling look, as though she had just become aware of her presence.

'I have none to bring,' said Erica. 'I do not profess to sing; I only sing our own Scotch airs.'

'Exactly what I said!' exclaimed Donovan. 'And Scotch singing of Scotch airs is like nothing else in the world.'

Whether he mesmerised them both, or whether his stronger will and higher purpose prevailed, it would be hard to say. Certainly Erica was quite as unwilling to sing as Lady Caroline was to favour her with a request. Both had to yield, however, and Erica, whether she would or not, had to serve her roomful of enemies—and a great deal of good it did her.

Out of the quiet conservatory they came into the heat and glare and Babel of voices; Lady Caroline feeling as if she had been caught in her own trap, Erica wavering between resentful defiance and the desire to substitute Donovan's 'How can I serve?' for 'What do they think?'

She sat down to the piano, which was in a far-away corner, and soon she had forgotten her audience altogether. Although she had had little time or opportunity for a thorough musical education, she had great taste, and was musical by nature; she sang her national airs as very few could have sung them, and so wild and pathetic was the air she had chosen, 'The Flowers of the Forest,' that the roar of conversation at once ceased. She knew nothing

whatever about the listeners; the air had taken her back to her father's recovery at Codrington the year before. She was singing to him once more.

The old gentleman who had sat on her right hand at dinner came up now with his first remark.

'Thank you, that was a real treat, and a very rare treat. I wonder whether you would sing an old favourite of mine—"Oh, why did ye gang, lassie?"'

Erica at once complied, and there was such pathos in her low, clear voice that tears stood in the eyes of more than one listener. She had never dared to sing that song at home since one evening some weeks before, when her father had just walked out of the room, unable to bear the mournful refrain—'I never, never thought ye wad leave me!' The song was closely associated with the story of that summer, and she sang it to perfection.

Donovan Farrant came towards her again at the close.

'I want to introduce my wife to you,' he said.

And Erica found that the young married lady in the pale blue silk, whom she had singled out as the one approachable lady in the room, was Mrs. Farrant. She was very bright, and sunshiny, and talkative. Erica liked her, and would have liked her still better had not the last week shown her so much of the unreality and insincerity of society, that she half doubted whether anyone she met in Greyshot could be quite true. Mrs. Farrant's manner was charming, but charming manners had often turned out to be exceedingly artificial, and Erica, who was in rather a hard mood, would not let herself be won over, but held her judgment in suspension, responding brightly enough to her companion's talk, but keeping the best part of herself in reserve.

At length the evening ended, and the guests gradually dispersed. Mr. Cuthbert walked across the road to his vicarage, still chuckling to himself as he thought of the general discomfiture caused by his question. The musical old gentleman returned to his home revolving a startlingly new idea: after all, might not the Raeburns and such people be very much like the

rest of the world? Were they not probably as susceptible to pain and pleasure, to comfort and discomfort, to rudeness and civility? He regretted very much that he had not broken the miserably uncomfortable silence at dinner.

Donovan Farrant and his wife were already far from Greyshot, driving along the quiet country road to Oakdene Manor.

'A lovely girl,' Mrs. Farrant was saying. 'I should like to know her better. To-night I had the feeling somehow that she was purposely keeping on the surface of things, one came every now and then to a sort of wall, a kind of hard reserve.'

'Who can wonder!' exclaimed Donovan. 'I am afraid, Gladys, the old proverb will have a very fair chance of being fulfilled. That child has come out seeking wool, and as likely as not she'll go home shorn.'

'Society can be very cruel!' sighed Gladys. 'I did so long to get to her after dinner; but Lady Caroline kept me, I do believe, purposely.'

'Lady Caroline and Mr. Cuthbert will little dream of the harm they have done,' said Dono-

van. 'I think I understand as I never understood before the burning indignation of that rebuke to the Pharisees,—"Full well ye reject the commandment of God that ye may keep your own traditions"!'

In the meantime there was dead silence in the Fane-Smiths' carriage, an ominous silence. There was an unmistakeable cloud on Mr. Fane-Smith's face: he had been exceedingly annoyed at what had taken place, and, with native perversity, attributed it all to Erica. His wife was miserable. She felt that her intended kindness had proved a complete failure; she was afraid of her husband's clouded brow, still more afraid of her niece's firmly closed mouth, most afraid of all at the thought of Lady Caroline's displeasure. Nervous and overwrought, anxious to conciliate all parties, and afraid of making matters worse, she timidly went into Erica's room, and, after beating about the bush for a minute or two, plunged rashly into the sore subject.

'I am so sorry, dear, about to-night,' she said. 'I wish it could have been prevented.'

Erica, standing up straight and tall in her

velveteen dress, with a white shawl half thrown back from her shoulders, looked to her aunt terribly dignified and uncompromising.

'I can't say that I thought them courteous,' she replied.

'It was altogether unfortunate,' said Mrs. Fane-Smith, hurriedly. 'I hoped your name would not transpire; I ought to have suggested the change to you before, but——'

'What change?' asked Erica, her forehead contracting a little.

'We thought—we hoped that perhaps, if you adopted our name, it might prevent unpleasantness. Such things are done, you know, and then, too, we might make some arrangement about your grandfather's money, a part of which I feel is now yours by right. Even now the change would show people the truth, would save many disagreeables.'

During this speech Erica's face had been a study; an angry glow of colour rushed to her cheeks, her eyes flashed dangerously. She was a young girl, but there was a good deal of the lion about her at that minute, and her aunt trembled, listening perforce to the indignant outburst.

'What truth would it show?' she cried. 'I don't believe there is such a thing as truth among all these wretched shams! I will never change my name to escape from prejudice and bigotry, or to win a share in my grandfather's property! What! give up my father's name to gain the money which might have kept him from pain, and ruin, and semi-starvation? take the money that might have brought comfort to my mother!—that might have kept me with her to the end! I couldn't take it! I would rather die than touch one penny of it! It is too late now. If you thought I would consent—if that is the reason you asked me here, I can go at once. I would not willingly have brought shame upon you, but neither will I dishonour myself nor insult my father by changing my name. Why, to do so would be to proclaim that I judged him as those Pharisees did to-night! The hypocrites! Which of them can show one grain of love for the race, to set against my father's life of absolute devotion? They sit over their champagne and slander atheists, and then have the face to call themselves Christians!'

'My dear!' said Mrs. Fane-Smith, nervously, 'our only wish is to do what is best for you; but you are too tired and excited to discuss this now. I will wish you good-night.'

'I never wish to discuss it again, thank you,' said Erica, submitting to a particularly warm embrace.

Mrs. Fane-Smith was right in one way. Erica was intensely excited. When people have been riding, rough-shod, over one's heart, one is apt to be excited, and Luke Raeburn's daughter had inherited that burning sense of indignation which was so strongly marked a characteristic in Raeburn himself. Violins can be more sweet and delicate in tone than any other instrument, but they can also wail with greater pathos, and produce a more fearful storm of passion.

Declining any assistance from Gemma, Erica locked her door, caught up some sheets of foolscap, snatched up her pen, and began to write rapidly. She knew well enough that she ought not to have written. But when the heart is hot with indignation, when the brain produces scathing sentences, when the subject seems to

have taken possession of the whole being, to deny it utterance is quite the hardest thing in the world.

Erica struggled to resist, but at length yielded, and out rushed sarcasms, denunciations, return blows innumerable! The relief was great. However, her enjoyment was but short, for by the time her article was rolled up for the post, stamped and directed, her physical powers gave way; such blank exhaustion ensuing that all she could do was to drag herself across the room, throw herself, half dressed, on the bed, draw the rezai over her, and yield to the heavy, overpowering slumber of great weariness.

It seemed to her that she slept for about five minutes, and was then roused by a knocking at her door. She started up, and found that it was morning. Then she recollected bolting her door, and sprang out of bed to undo it, but was reminded at once that she had a spine. She had quite recovered from the effects of her illness, but over-fatigue always brought back the old pain, and warned her that she must be more careful in the future. The housemaid

seemed a little surprised not to find her up and dressed as usual, for Erica generally got through an hour's writing before the nine o'clock breakfast.

'Are you ill, miss?' she asked, glancing at the face which seemed almost as colourless as the pillow.

'Only very tired, thank you,' said Erica, glad enough to-day of the cup of tea and the thin bread-and-butter, which before had seemed to her such an absurd luxury.

'Letters for the early post, miss, I suppose,' said the housemaid, taking up the fiery effusion.

'Please,' replied Erica, not turning her head, and far too weary to give a thought to her last night's work. All she could think of just then was the usual waking reflection of a sufferer—'How in the world shall I get through the day?'

The recollection, however, of her parting conversation with her aunt made her determined to be down to breakfast. Her absence might be misconstrued. And though feeling ill-prepared for remonstrance or argument, she was in her place when the gong sounded for prayers, looking white and weary indeed, but with a curve

of resoluteness about her mouth. Nobody found out how tired she was. Mr. Fane-Smith was as blind as a bat, and Mrs. Fane-Smith was too low-spirited and too absorbed with her own cares to notice. The events of last night looked more and more disagreeable, and she was burdened with thoughts of what people would say; moreover, Rose's cold was much worse, and as her mother was miserable if even her little finger ached, she was greatly disturbed, and persuaded herself that her child was really in a most dangerous state.

Breakfast proved a very silent meal that morning, quite oppressively silent; Erica felt like a child in disgrace. Every now and then the grimness of it appealed to her sense of the ludicrous, she felt inclined to scream or do something desperate just to see what would happen. At length the dreary repast came to an end, and she had just taken up a newspaper, with a sort of gasp of relief at the thought of escaping for a moment into a larger world, when she was recalled to the narrow circle of Greyshot by a word from Mr. Fane-Smith.

'I wish to have a talk with you, my dear; will you come to the library at ten o'clock?'

An interview by appointment! That sounded formidable! When the time came, Erica went rather apprehensively to the library, fearing that she was in for an argument, and wishing that Mr. Fane-Smith had chosen a day on which she felt a little more up to things.

He received her very kindly, and drew an easy chair up to the fire for her, no doubt doing as he would be done by, for he was a chilly Indian mortal. Erica had never been into the library before. It was a delightful room, furnished with old carved oak and carpeted with soft Indian rugs. Though dignified by the name of library, it was not nearly so crowded with books as the little study at home; all the volumes were beautifully bound in much begilt calf or morocco, but they had not the used loved look of her father's books. On the mantelpiece there were some models of Indian idols exquisitely carved in soft, greenish-grey soap-stone, and behind these, as if in protest, lurked the only unornamental thing in the room, a very ordinary missionary box, covered

with orange-coloured paper and impressively black negroes.

'I am sure, my dear,' said Mr. Fane-Smith, 'that after what occurred last night you will see the desirability of thinking seriously about your plans for the future. I have been intending to speak to you, but waited until we had learnt to know each other a little. However, I regret now that I delayed. It is naturally far from desirable that you should remain an inmate of your father's house, and my wife and I should be very glad if you would make your home with us. Of course, when it was fully understood in Greyshot that you had utterly renounced your father and your former friends, such unpleasantness as you encountered last night would not again occur; indeed, I fancy you would become exceedingly popular. It would perhaps have been wiser if you would have taken our name, but your aunt tells me you object to that.'

'Yes,' said Erica, who was writhing with anger, and relieved herself by the slight sarcasm, 'I do object to be Miss Feign-Fane-Smith.'

'Well, that must be as you please,' he re-

sumed; 'but I really think if you will accept our offer it will be for your ultimate good.'

He proceeded to enumerate all the benefits which would accrue to her; then paused.

Erica was silent for a minute. When she spoke it was in the low voice of one who is struggling to restrain passion.

'I am sure you mean this very kindly,' she said. 'I have tried to listen to your offer patiently, though, of course, the moment you began, I knew that I must entirely—emphatically decline it. I will *never* leave my father!'

The last words were spoken with a sort of half-restrained outburst, as if the pent-up passion must find some outlet.

Mr. Fane-Smith was startled. He so seldom thought of Luke Raeburn as a fellow-being at all, that perhaps it had never occurred to him that the love of parent to child, and child to parent, is quite independent of creed.

'But, my dear,' he said, 'you have been baptised.'

'I have.'

'You promised to renounce the devil and all his works.'

'I did.'

'Then how can you hesitate to renounce everything connected with your former life?'

'Do you mean to imply that my father is the devil—or one of his works?'

Mr. Fane-Smith was silent. Erica continued.

'God's Fatherhood does not depend on our knowledge of it, or acceptance of it, it is a fact—a truth! How then can anyone dare to say that such a man as my father is a work of the devil! I thought the sin of sins was to attribute to the devil what belongs to God!'

'You are in a very peculiar position,' said Mr. Fane-Smith, uneasily. 'And I have no doubt it is difficult for you to see things as they really are. But I, who can look at the matter dispassionately, can see that your remaining in your old home would be most dangerous, and not only that, but most painful! To live in a house where you hear all that you most reverence evil spoken of! why, the pain would be unspeakable!'

'I know that,' said Erica, in a low voice, 'I have found that,—I admit that it is and always

will be harder to bear than anyone can conceive who has not tried. But to shirk pain is not to follow Christ. As to danger, if you will forgive my saying so, I should find a luxurious life in a place like Greyshot infinitely more trying.'

'Then could you not take up nursing? Or go into some sisterhood? Nothing extreme, you know, but just a working sisterhood.'

Erica smiled and shook her head.

'Why should I try to make another vocation when God has already given me one?'

'But, my dear, consider the benefit to your own soul.'

'A very secondary consideration!' exclaimed Erica, impetuously.

'I should have thought,' continued Mr. Fane-Smith, 'that under such strange circumstances you would have seen how necessary it was to forsake all. Think of St. Matthew, for instance, he rose up at once, forsook all, and followed Him.'

'Yes,' said Erica. 'And what was the very first thing he was impelled to do by way of "following"? Why, to make a great feast and

have in all his old friends, all the despised publicans.'

'My dear Erica,' said Mr. Fane-Smith, feeling his theological arguments worsted, 'we must discuss this matter on practical grounds. In plain words, your father is a very bad man, and you ought to have nothing more to do with him.'

Erica's lips turned white with anger; but she answered, calmly,

'That is a very great accusation. How do you know it is true?'

'I know it well enough,' said Mr. Fane-Smith. 'Why, everyone in England knows it.'

'If you accept mere hearsay evidence, you may believe anything of anyone. Have you ever read any of my father's books?'

'No.'

'Or heard him lecture?'

'No, indeed, I would not hear him on any account.'

'Have you ever spoken with any of his intimate friends?'

'Mr. Raeburn's acquaintances are not likely to mix with anyone I should know.'

'Then,' cried Erica, 'how can you know anything whatever about him? And how—how *dare* you say to me, his child, that he is a wicked man?'

'It is a matter of common notoriety.'

'No,' said Erica, 'there you are wrong. It is notorious that my father teaches—conscientiously teaches—much that we regard as error, but people who openly accuse him of evil-living find to their cost in the law-courts that they have foully libelled him.'

She flushed even now at the thought of some of the hateful and wicked accusations of the past. Then, after a moment's pause, she continued, more warmly,

'It is you people in society who get hold of some misquoted story, some ridiculous libel long ago crushed at the cost of the libeller,—it is you who do untold mischief! Only last summer I remember seeing in a paper the truest sentence that was ever written of my father, and it was this, "Probably no one man has ever had to endure such gross personal insults, such wide-spread hostility, such perpetual calumny." Why are you to judge him?

Even if you had a special call to it, how could you justly judge him when you will not hear him, or know him, or fairly study his writings, or question his friends? How can you know anything whatever about him? Why, if he judged you and your party as you judge him, you would be furious!'

'My dear, you speak with so much warmth, if you would only discuss things calmly!' said Mr. Fane-Smith. 'Remember what George Herbert says—"Calmness is great advantage." You bring too much feeling to the discussion.'

'How can I help feeling when you are slandering my father!' exclaimed Erica. 'I have tried to be calm, but there are limits to endurance! Would you like Rose to sit silently while my father told her without any ground that you were a wicked man?'

When matters were reversed in this crude way, Mr. Fane-Smith winced a little.

'The cases are different,' he suggested.

'Do you think atheists don't love their children as much as Christians!' cried Erica, half-choked with indignant anger. A vision of the past, of her dead mother, of her father's

never-failing tenderness brought a cloud of tears to her eyes. She brushed them away. 'The cases are different, as you say; but does a man care less for his home, when outside it he is badgered and insulted, or does he care infinitely more? Does a man care less for his child because, to get her food, he has had to go short himself, or does he care more? I think the man who has had to toil with all his might for his family loves it better than the rich man can. You say I speak with too much warmth, too much feeling. My complaint is the other way—I can't find words strong enough to give you any idea of what my father has always been to me. To leave him would be to wrong my conscience, and to forsake my duty, and to distrust God. I will *never* leave him!'

With that she got up and left the room, and Mr. Fane-Smith leant back in his chair with a sigh, his eyes fixed absently upon a portrait of Napoleon above his mantelpiece, his mind more completely shaken out of its ordinary grooves than it had been for years. He was a narrow-minded man, but he was honest. He saw that he had judged Raeburn very unfairly.

But perhaps what occupied his thoughts the most was the question—'Would Rose have been able to say of him all that Erica had said of her father?' He sighed many times, but after awhile slid back into the old habits of thought.

'Erica is a brave, noble, little thing,' he said to himself, 'but far from orthodox—far from orthodox! Socinian tendencies.'

CHAPTER XI.

AT OAKDENE MANOR.

Ah! to how many faith has been
No evidence of things unseen,
But a dim shadow that re-casts
The creed of the Phantasiasts.
. . . . . .
For others a diviner creed
Is living in the life they lead.
The passing of their beautiful feet
Blesses the pavement of the street,
And all their looks and words repeat
Old Fuller's saying wise and sweet,
Not as a vulture, but a dove,
The Holy Ghost came from above.

Tales of a Wayside Inn. LONGFELLOW.

DURING the interview Erica had braced herself up to endure, but when it was over her strength all at once evaporated. She dragged herself upstairs somehow, and had just reached her room, when Mrs. Fane-Smith met her. She was pre-occupied with her own anxieties, or Erica's

exhaustion could not have escaped her notice.

'I am really quite unhappy about Rose!' she exclaimed. 'We must send for Dr. L——. Her cough seems so much worse, I fear it will turn to bronchitis. Are you learned in such things?'

'I helped to nurse Tom through a bad attack once,' said Erica.

'Oh! then, do come and see her,' said Mrs. Fane-Smith.

Erica went without a word. She would not have liked Mrs. Fane-Smith's fussing, but yet the sight of her care for Rose made her feel more achingly conscious of the blank in her own life—that blank which nothing could ever fill. She wanted her own mother so terribly, and just now Mr. Fane-Smith had touched the old wound roughly.

Rose seemed remarkably cheerful, and not nearly so much invalided as her mother thought.

'Mamma always thinks I am going to die if I'm at all out of sorts,' she remarked, when Mrs. Fane-Smith had left the room to write to the doctor. 'I believe you want doctoring much more than I do. What is the matter? You are as white as a sheet!'

'I am tired and rather worried, and my back is troublesome,' said Erica.

'Then you'll just lie down on my sofa,' said Rose, peremptorily. 'If you don't, I shall get out of bed and make you.'

Erica did not require much compulsion, for every inch of her seemed to have a separate ache, and she was still all quivering and tingling with the indignant anger stirred up by her interview with Mr. Fane-Smith. She let Rose chatter away, and tried hard to school herself into calmness. By-and-by her efforts were rewarded; she not only grew calm, but fell asleep, and slept like any baby till the gong sounded for luncheon.

Luncheon proved a very silent meal; it was, if possible, more trying than breakfast had been. Mrs. Fane-Smith had heard all about the interview from her husband, and they were both perplexed and disturbed. Erica felt uncertain of her footing with them, and could only wait for them to make the first move. But the grim silence tickled her fancy.

'Really,' she thought to herself, 'we might be so many horses munching away at mangers, for all we have said to each other.'

But, in spite of it, she did not feel inclined to make conversation.

Later on she went for a drive with her aunt; the air revived her, and she began to feel more like herself again. They went out into the country, but on the way home Mrs. Fane-Smith stopped at one of the shops in High Street, leaving Erica in the carriage. She was leaning back restfully, watching a beautiful chestnut horse which was being held by a ragged boy at the door of the bank just opposite, when her attention was suddenly aroused by an ominous howling and barking. The chestnut horse began to kick, and the boy had as much as he could do to hold him. Starting forward, Erica saw that a fox-terrier had been set upon by another and larger dog, and that the two were having a desperate fight. The fox-terrier was evidently fighting against fearful odds, for he was an old dog, and not nearly so strong as his antagonist; the howls and barks grew worse and worse; some of the passengers ran off in a fright, others watched from a safe distance, but not one interfered.

Now Erica was a great lover of animals, and a passionate lover of justice. Furious to see

men and boys looking on without attempting to stop the mischief, she sprang out of the carriage and, rushing up to the combatants, belaboured the big dog with her parasol. It had a strong stick, but she hit so vehemently that it splintered all to bits, and still the dog would not leave its victim. Then, in her desperation, she hit on the right remedy; with great difficulty she managed to grasp him by the throat, and, using all her force, so nearly suffocated him that he was obliged to loosen his hold. At that moment, too, a strong man rushed forward and dealt him such a fearful blow that he bounded off with a yell of pain, and ran howling down the street. Erica bent over the fox-terrier then; the big dog had mangled it frightfully, it was covered with blood, and moaned piteously.

'Waif! my poor Waif!' exclaimed a voice which she seemed to know. 'Has that brute killed you?'

She looked up and saw Donovan Farrant; he recognised her, but they were both too much absorbed in the poor dog's condition to think of any ordinary greeting.

'Where will you take him?' asked Erica.

Donovan stooped down to examine poor Waif's injuries.

'I fear there is little to be done,' he said. 'But we might take him across to the chemist's opposite. Will you hold my whip for me?'

She took it, and with infinite skill and tenderness Donovan lifted the fox-terrier, while Erica hurried on in front to tell the chemist. They took Waif into a little back room, and did all they could for him; but the chemist shrugged his shoulders.

'Better kill the poor brute at once, Mr. Farrant,' he said, blandly.

Donovan looked up with a strange gleam in his eyes.

'Not for the world!' he exclaimed, with a touch of indignation in his tone.

And after that he only spoke to Erica, who, seeing that the chemist had annoyed him, undertook all the fetching and carrying, never once shrinking, though the sight was a horrible one. At length the footman brought word that Mrs. Fane-Smith was waiting, and she was obliged to go, reluctantly enough.

'You'll let me know how he gets on?' she said.

'Yes, indeed,' he replied, not thanking her directly for her help, but somehow sending her away with the consciousness that they had passed the bounds of mere acquaintanceship, and were friends for life.

She found that her aunt had been waylaid by Mr. Cuthbert.

'If I were the owner of the dog, I should have up our honourable member for assault. I believe Miss Raeburn broke her umbrella over the poor thing.'

Erica was just in time to hear this.

'Were you watching it?' she exclaimed. 'And you did nothing to help the fox-terrier?'

'I do not feel bound to champion every fighting cur who is getting the worst of it,' said Mr. Cuthbert. 'What has become of Mr. Farrant's favourite? I suppose he is fussing over it instead of studying the affairs of the nation.'

'I am afraid the dog is dying,' said Erica.

A curious change passed over Mr. Cuthbert's face; he looked a little shocked, and turned away somewhat hastily.

'Come,' thought Erica to herself, 'I am glad to have discovered a grain of good in you.'

The next day was Sunday; it passed by very quietly. But on the Monday, when Erica opened the *Daily Review*, there was her 'Society' article staring her in the face. It was clever and eminently readable, but it was bitterly sarcastic; she could not endure it. It seemed to her that she had written what was positively bad, calculated to mislead and to awaken bitterness, not in the least likely to mend matters. The fact was she had written it in a moment of passion and against her conscience, and she regretted it now with far more compunction than she felt for anything she had written in former times in the *Idol-Breaker*. Then, though indirectly and sometimes directly attacking Christianity, she had written conscientiously, now for the first time she felt that she had dishonoured her pen. She went down into the very deepest depths.

The midday post brought her a letter from her stiff old editor, who understood her better, and thought more of her than she dreamed. It informed her that another member of the staff

had returned from his holiday, and if she pleased she could be exempted from writing for a fortnight. As usual Mr. Bircham 'begged to remain hers faithfully.'

She hardly knew whether to regard this as a relief or as a punishment. With a sigh she opened a second letter; it was from Charles Osmond, in reply to a despairing note which she had sent off just before her Saturday interview with Mr. Fane-Smith.

It was one of his short, characteristic letters.

'DEAR ERICA,

'"It all comes in the day's work," as the man said when the lion ate him! You should have a letter, but I'm up to the eyes in parish matters. All I can say is—pray for that charity which covers the multitude of sins, and then I think you'll find the Greyshot folk become more bearable. So you have met Donovan at last. I am right glad! Your father and I had a long walk together yesterday; he seems very well.

'Yours ever,

'C. O.'

This made her smile, and she opened a third letter which ran as follows:

'My dear Miss Raeburn,

'I should have called on you last Saturday, but was not well enough to come in to Greyshot. My husband told me all about your help and your kindness to poor Waif. I know you will be glad to hear that he is going on well; he is much more to us all than an ordinary favourite, some day you shall hear his story. I am writing now to ask, *sans cérémonie*, if you will come and spend a few days with us. It will be a great pleasure to us if you will say yes. My husband will be in Greyshot on Monday afternoon, and will call for your answer; please come if you can.

'Yours very sincerely,

'Gladys Farrant.'

Erica showed this letter to her aunt, and of course there was nothing to prevent her going; indeed, Mrs. Fane-Smith was really rather relieved, for she thought a few days' absence might make things more comfortable for Erica, and, besides, Rose's illness made the days dull for her.

It was about four o'clock when Donovan Farrant arrived. Erica felt as though she were meeting an old friend when she went into the drawing-room, and found him standing on the hearthrug.

'You have had my wife's note?' he asked, taking her hand.

'Yes,' she replied.

'And you will come?'

'If you will have me.'

'That's right; we had set our hearts on it. You are looking very tired. I hope Saturday did not upset you?'

'No,' said Erica. 'But there have been a good many worries, and I've not yet learnt the art of taking life quietly.'

'You are overdone, you want a rest,' said Donovan, whose keen and practised observation had at once noticed her delicate *physique* and peculiar temperament. 'You are a poet, you see, and, as a wise man once remarked, "The poetic temperament is one of singular irritability of nerve."'

Erica laughed.

'I am no poet!'

'Not a writer of verses, but a poet in the sense of a maker, an artist. As a reader of the *Daily Review*, you must allow me to judge. Brian once showed me one of your articles, and I always recognise them now by the style.'

'I don't deserve the name of artist one bit,' said Erica, colouring. 'I would give all I have to destroy my article of to-day. You have not seen that, or you would not have given me such a name.'

'Yes, I have seen it, I read it this morning at breakfast, and made up my mind that you wrote it on Friday evening, after Lady Caroline's dinner. I can understand that you hate the thing now. One gets a sharp lesson every now and then, and it lasts one a lifetime.'

Erica sighed. He resumed.

'Well! are you coming to Oakdene with me?'

'Did you mean now—at once—to-day?'

'If you will.'

'Oh, I should so like to!' she cried. 'But will Mrs. Farrant be expecting me?'

'She will be hoping for you, and that is better.'

Erica was noted for the speed with which she

could pack a portmanteau, and it could not have been more than ten minutes before she was ready. Mrs. Fane-Smith wished her good-bye with a sort of affectionate relief; then Donovan helped her into the pony-carriage, and drove briskly off through the Greyshot streets.

'That is the place where I first heard your father,' he said, indicating with his whip the Town Hall. 'It must be sixteen years ago; I was quite a young fellow.'

'Sixteen years! Did you hear him so long ago as that?' said Erica, thoughtfully. 'Why that must have been about the time of the great Stockborough trial.'

'It was; I remember reference being made to it, and how it stirred me up to think of Mr. Raeburn's gallant defence of freedom, and all that it was costing him. How well I remember, too, riding home that night along this very road, with the thoughts of the good of the race, the love of humanity, touched into life for the first time. When a selfish cynic first catches a glimpse of an honest man toiling for what he believes the good of humanity, it is a wonderful moment for him! Mr. Raeburn was about the

only man living that I believed in. You can understand that I owe him an immense debt of gratitude.'

'That is what you referred to in the House last year!' said Erica. 'How curiously lives are linked together! Words spoken by my father years ago set thoughts working in you—you make a speech and refer to them. I read a report of your speech in a time of chaotic wretchedness, and it comes like an answer to a prayer!'

'Another bond between us,' said Donovan.

After that they were silent; they had left the high road and were driving along winding country lanes, catching glimpses every now and then of golden corn-fields still unreaped, or of fields just beginning to be dotted with sheaves, where the men were at work. It was a late harvest that year, but a good one. Presently they passed the tiny little village church which nestled under the brow of the hill, and then came a steep ascent, which made Donovan spring out of the pony-chaise. Erica's words had awakened a long train of thought, had carried him back to the far past, and had brought

him fresh proof of that wonderful unity of Nature which, though often little dreamed of, binds man to man. He gave the ponies a rest half way up the hill, and, stretching up into the high hedge, gathered a beautiful spray of red-berried briony for Erica.

'Do you remember that grand thought which Shakspere puts into the mouth of Henry V.—

"There is some soul of goodness in things evil."

'Tis wonderful to look back in life and trace it out.'

He spoke rather abruptly, but Erica's thoughts had been following much the same bent, and she understood him.

'Trust is easy on such a day as this and in such a place,' she said, looking down to the beautiful valley and up to the green, encircling hills.

Donovan smiled, and touched-up the ponies.

It seemed to Erica that they had turned their backs on bigotry, and annoyance, and care of every description, and were driving right into a land of rest. Presently they turned in at some iron gates, and drove down a long ap-

proach, bordered with fir-trees. At the end of this stood the manor, a solid, comfortable, well-built country-house, its rather plain exterior veiled with ivy and creepers. Donovan led her into the hall, where stately old high-backed chairs and a suit or two of old armour were intermixed with modern appliances, fishing tackle, a lawn-tennis box, and a sprinkling of toys, which indicated that there were children in the house.

This fact was speedily indicated in another way, for there came a rush and a scamper overhead, and a boy of five or six years old ran down the broad oak staircase.

'Oh, father! may I ride round to the stables on Speedwell?' he cried, in a desperate hurry to attract his father's attention away from the servant and the portmanteau; then, catching sight of Erica, he checked himself, and held out his hand with a sort of shy courtesy. He was exactly what Donovan must have been as a child, as far as looks went.

'To the stables, Ralph?' replied his father, looking round. 'Yes, if you like. Put on your hat, though. Where's your mother?'

'In the garden, with Mr. Cunningham; he came a few minutes ago; and he's got such a horse, father! a real beauty—just like cocoa.'

'A roan,' said Donovan, laughing; then, as Ralph disappeared through the open door, he turned to the servant.

'Is it Mr. Cunningham of Blachingbury?'

'No, sir; Mr. Leslie Cunningham.'

Erica listened, not without interest, for she knew that Leslie Cunningham was the recently-elected member for East Mountshire, and the eldest son of Sir Michael Cunningham.

'We must come and find them,' said Donovan; and together they went out into the garden.

Here, on one of the broad, grassy terraces, under the shade of a copper-beech, was afternoon tea, on a wicker table. Gladys was talking to Mr. Cunningham, but catching sight of her husband and Erica at the other end of the terrace, she hurried forward to greet them.

'This is delightful!' she exclaimed. 'I hoped that Donovan might unceremoniously carry you off to-day, but hardly dared to expect it. You are just in time for tea.'

'Your arrival has caused quite a sensation in

the nursery,' said Donovan to Leslie Cunningham. 'My small boy is in raptures over your horse—"just like cocoa!"'

Leslie gave rather an absent laugh. He was watching Erica, who was still at a little distance talking to Gladys.

'May I be introduced to your guest?' he said.

'Certainly,' said Donovan. 'She is the daughter of Mr. Raeburn.'

Leslie started.

'Indeed! I have heard about her from old Bircham, the editor. He can't say enough of her.'

Apparently Leslie Cunningham could not look enough at her.

Donovan, thinking of Brian, was perhaps a little vexed at the meeting. However, putting himself into his guest's position, he felt that the admiration was but natural, and as to Brian—if he chose to lose his heart to such a lovely girl, he must expect to have many rivals.

Erica's first thought, as she glanced at Leslie Cunningham, was one of disappointment. He was not the least like his father. However, by degrees she began to like him for his own sake.

He could not have been more than five-and-twenty, and looked even younger; for he was fair-complexioned and clean-shaven. His thick, flaxen hair, and rather pallid face were decidedly wanting in colour, but were relieved by very dark-grey eyes. His features were well cut and regular, and the face was altogether a clever as well as an attractive one.

Erica felt as if she had got into a very delicious new world. The novelty of a meal *al fresco*, the lovely view, the beautifully laid out grounds were charming externals; and then there were the deeper enjoyments—the loveability of her host and hostess; the delightful atmosphere of broad-hearted sympathy in which they seemed to live and move, and, above all, the restfulness, the freedom of not living in momentary expectation of being rubbed the wrong way by vexing conversation on religious, or political, or personal topics. It was like a beautiful dream—quite unlike any part of real, waking existence that she had ever before known. The conversation was bright and lively. They talked because they had something to say, and wished to say it,

and the artificial element so prevalent in society talk was entirely absent.

Presently Ralph came out of the house, leading a fairy-like little girl of four years old.

'Here come the children,' said Gladys. 'The hour before dinner is their special time. You have not seen Dolly, have you?'

'Dolly!' The name awoke some recollection of the past in Erica, and, as she kissed the little girl, she looked at her closely. Yes, it was the same fascinating little baby face, with its soft, pink cheeks and little pointed chin, its innocent, blue-grey eyes, its tiny, sweet-tempered mouth. The sunny brown hair was longer, and Dolly was an inch or two taller, but she was undoubtedly the same.

'Now I know why I always felt that I knew your face!' exclaimed Erica, turning to Donovan. 'Was not Dolly lost at Codrington last year?'

'On the beach,' replied Donovan. 'Yes! Why, could it have been you who brought her back? Of course it was! now it all comes back to me! I had exactly the same feeling about knowing your face the other evening at Lady Caroline's, but put it down to your like-

ness to Mr. Raeburn. There is another bond between us!'

They both laughed. Donovan took Dolly upon his knee.

'Do you remember, Dolly, when you were lost on the beach once?'

'Yes,' said Dolly, promptly, 'I cried.'

'Who found you?'

'Farver,' said Dolly.

'Who brought you to father?'

Dolly searched her memory.

'An old gentleman gave Dolly sweets!'

'My father!' said Erica, smiling.

'And who helped you up the beach?' asked Gladys.

'A plitty lady did,' said Dolly.

'Was it this lady, do you think?' said Donovan, indicating Erica.

Dolly trotted round with her dear little laughing face to make the scrutiny.

'I fink vis one is plittier,' she announced. Whereupon everyone began to laugh.

'The most charming compliment I ever heard!' said Leslie Cunningham. 'Dolly ought to be patted on the back.'

Erica smiled and coloured; but, as she looked again at Donovan and little Dolly, her thoughts wandered away to that June day in the museum when they had been the parable which shadowed forth to her such a wonderful reality. Truly, there were links innumerable between her and Donovan.

Leslie Cunningham seemed as if he intended to stay for ever; however, everyone was quite content to sit out on the lawn talking and watching the children at their play. It was one of those still, soft September evenings, when one is glad of any excuse to keep out of doors.

At last the dressing-bell rang, and Leslie took out his watch with an air of surprise.

'The afternoon has flown!' he exclaimed, 'I had no idea it was so late. I wanted to ask you, by-the-by, whether I could see the coffee tavern at Greyshot. We are going to start one down at our place, and I want to see one or two well-managed ones first. Whereabouts is it? I think I'll ride on now, and have a look at it.'

'Dine with us first,' said Donovan, 'and I'll

ride over with you between eight and nine, that is the best time for seeing it in full swing.'

So Leslie Cunningham stayed to dinner, and talked a great deal about temperance work, but did not succeed in blinding his host, who knew well enough that Erica had been the real cause of his desire to go over to Greyshot.

Temperance, however, proved a fortunate subject, for it was, of course, one in which she was deeply interested, all the more so now that it formed one of the strongest bonds remaining between herself and her father's followers. A large number of the Raeburnites were either teetotalers or very strong temperance advocates, and Erica, who was constantly out and about in the poorer parts of London, had realised forcibly the terrible national evil, and was an enthusiastic temperance worker.

Donovan, perhaps out of *malice prepense,* administered a good many dry details about the management of coffee-taverns, personal supervision, Etzensberger's machines, the necessity of a good site and attractive building, &c., &c. Erica only wished that Tom could have been

there, he would have been so thoroughly in his element. By-and-by the conversation drifted away to other matters. And as Leslie Cunningham was a good and very amusing talker, and Gladys the perfection of a hostess, the dinner proved very lively, an extraordinary contrast to the dreary, vapid table-talk to which Erica had lately been accustomed. After the ladies had left the room, Donovan, rather to his amusement, found the talk veering round to Luke Raeburn. Presently, Leslie Cunningham hazarded a direct question about Erica in a would-be indifferent tone. In reply, Donovan told him briefly and without comment what he knew of her history, keeping on the surface of things and speaking always with a sort of careful restraint. He was never very fond of discussing people, and perhaps in this case the realisation of the thousand objections to any serious outcome of Leslie's sudden admiration strengthened his reserve. However, fate was apparently kinder though perhaps really more cruel than the host, for Donovan was summoned into the library to interview an aggrieved constituent, and Leslie, finding his way to the

drawing-room, was only too delighted to meet Gladys going upstairs to see her children.

The lamps were lighted in the drawing-room, but the curtains were not drawn, and beside the open window he saw a slim, white-robed figure. Erica was looking out into the gathering darkness. He crossed the room, and stood beside her, his heart beating quickly, all the more because she did not move or take any notice of his presence. It was unconventional, but perhaps because he was so weary of the ordinary young ladies who invariably smiled and fluttered the moment he approached them, and were so perfectly ready to make much of him, this unconventionality attracted him. He watched her for a minute in silence. She was very happy, and was looking her loveliest. Presently she turned.

'I think it is the stillness which is so wonderful!' she exclaimed.

It was spoken with the frankness of a child, with the spontaneous confidence of the pure child-nature, which instinctively recognises all the loveable and trustable. The clear, golden eyes looked right into his for a moment. A

strange reverence awoke within him. He had seen more beautiful eyes before, but none so entirely wanting in that unreality of expression arising from the wish to produce an effect, none so beautifully sincere.

'The country stillness, you mean?' he replied.

'Yes; it is rest in itself! I have never stayed in the country before.'

'Is it possible!' he exclaimed.

He had often languidly discussed the comparative advantages of Mürren and Zermatt with girls who took a yearly tour abroad as naturally as their dinner, but to talk to one who had spent her whole life in towns, who could enjoy a country evening so absolutely and unaffectedly, was a strange and delightful novelty.

'You are one of those who can really enjoy,' he said. 'You are not *blasée*—you are one of the happy mortals who keep the faculty of enjoyment as strongly all through life as in childhood.'

'Yes, I think I can enjoy,' said Erica. 'But I suppose we pay for our extra faculty of enjoyment.'

'You mean by being more sensitive to pain?'

'Yes, though that sounds rather like Dickens' Mrs. Gummidge, when she thought she felt smoky chimneys more than other people.'

He laughed.

'How I wish you could turn over your work to me, and go to Switzerland to-morrow in my place! Only I should wish to be there, too, for the sake of seeing you enjoy it.'

'Do you go to-morrow?'

'Yes, with my father.'

'Ah! how delightful! I confess I do envy you a little. I do long to see snow mountains. Always living in London makes one——'

He interrupted her with a sort of exclamation of horror.

'Oh! don't abuse London!' she said, laughing. 'If one must live all the year round in one place, I would rather be there than anywhere. When I hear people abusing it, I always think they don't know how to use their eyes. What can be more lovely, for instance, than the view from Greenwich Park by the observatory? Don't you know that beautiful clump of Scotch firs in the foreground, and then the glimpse of the river through the trees? And then there is

that lovely part by Queen Elizabeth's oak. The view from the bridge, too, over the Serpentine, how exquisite that is on a summer afternoon, with the Westminster towers standing up in a golden haze. Or Kensington Gardens in the autumn, when the leaves are turning, and there is blue mist in the background against the dark tree trunks. I think I love every inch of London!'

Leslie Cunningham would have listened to the praises of the Black Country, if only for the sake of hearing her voice.

'Well, as far as England goes, you are in the right place for scenery now; I know few lovelier parts than this.'

'What are those lights on the lower terrace?' asked Erica, suddenly.

'Glow-worms. Have you never seen them? Come and look at them nearer.'

'Oh, I should like to!' she said, with the charming enthusiasm and eagerness which delighted him so much.

To guide her down the steps in the dusky garden, to feel her hand on his arm, to hear her fresh, *naïve* remarks, and then to recall what

Donovan Farrant had just told him about her strange, sad story, all seemed to draw him on irresistibly. He had had three or four tolerably serious flirtations, but now he knew that he had never before really loved.

Erica was delighted with the glow-worms, and delighted with the dewy fragrance of the garden, and delighted with the soft, balmy stillness of the night. She was one of those who revel in Nature, and all that she said was evidently the overflow of a rapturous happiness, curiously contrasting with the ordinary set remarks of admiration, or falsely sentimental outbursts too much in vogue. But Leslie Cunningham found that the child-likeness was not only in manner, but that Erica had no idea of flirting; she was bright, and merry, and talkative, but she had no thought, no desire of attracting his attention. She had actually and literally come out into the garden to see the glow-worms, not to monopolise the much-run-after young M.P., and as soon as she had seen them she said she felt cold, and suggested going back again.

He was disappointed, but the words were so

perfectly sincere, so free from suspicion of mere conventionality, that there was nothing for it but to return. Half amused, half piqued, but wholly in love, he speedily forgot himself in real anxiety.

'I hope you haven't taken cold,' he said, with great solicitude.

'Oh, no,' said Erica; 'but I want to be careful, for the night-school work will be beginning soon, and I must go home fresh for that.'

Something in her words broke the spell of perfect, unbroken happiness which had hitherto held him. Was it the mention of her every-day life, with its surroundings unknown to him? or was it some faint perception that in the world of duty to which she referred their paths could not rightly converge? A cold chill crept over him.

'You were quite right,' he said, with an involuntary shiver. 'It is decidedly cold out here; the mist rises from the river, I expect, or else your reference to the working-day world has recalled me from fairyland. You should not speak of work in such a place as this—it is incongruous.'

She smiled.

'*Ernst ist das leben*,' she replied, quietly. 'One can't forget that even at such a time as this, and in such a place.'

'How is it that some never forget that for a moment, while others never remember it at all?' he said, musingly.

'Some of us have no excuse for ever forgetting,' she answered—'hardly a chance either.'

And though the words were vague, they shadowed out to him much of her life—a life never free from sorrow, burdened with constant care and anxiety, and ever confronted by some of the most perplexing world-problems. A longing to shield, and protect, and comfort her rose in his heart, yet all the time he instinctively knew that hers was the stronger nature.

It seemed that the seriousness of life was to be borne-in upon them specially that evening, for, returning to the drawing-room, they found Donovan released from his interview, and relating with some indignation the pitiable story he had just heard. It only reached Leslie Cunningham in fragments, however—overcrowding, children sleeping six in a bed, two of them

with scarlet fever, no fever hospital, no accommodation for them, an inspector, medical officer, the board—how drearily dry all the details seemed to him! He could do nothing but watch Erica's eager face, with its ever-varying play of expression. He hardly knew whether to be angry with Donovan Farrant for alluding to matters which brought a look of sadness to the golden eyes, or to thank him for the story which made her face light up with indignation, and look, if possible, more beautiful than before.

'Don't offer to put up a fever shanty on the lawn,' said Gladys, when her husband paused.

'I wish we had an empty cottage where we could put them,' said Donovan; 'but I am afraid all I can do is to bring pressure to bear upon the authorities. We'll ride over together, Cunningham, and Jack Trevethan, our manager, shall show you the tavern, while I rout out this medical officer.'

They had had tea; there was no longer any excuse for delaying. Leslie, with an outward smile and an inward sigh, turned to take leave of Erica. She was bending over a basket in which was curled up the invalid fox-terrier.

For a moment she left off stroking the white and tan head, and held out her hand.

'Good-bye,' she said, frankly.

That was all! And yet it made Leslie's heart bound. Was he indeed to go to Switzerland to-morrow? He *must* manage to get out of it somehow.

And all the way to Greyshot he listened to schemes for the work to be done next session, from the ardent sanitary reformer, though just then the devastation of all England would scarcely have roused him, so long as he was assured of the safety of Luke Raeburn's daughter.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HAPPIEST OF WEEKS.

He went in the strength of dependence
To tread where his Master trod,
To gather and knit together
The family of God.
. . . . . .
With a conscience freed from burdens,
And a heart set free from care,
To minister to everyone
Always and everywhere.

Author of *Chronicles of the Schönberg Cotta Family.*

AFTER this came a happy, uneventful week at the manor. Erica often thought of the definition of happiness which Charles Osmond had once given her—'Perfect harmony with your surroundings.' She had never been so happy in her life. Waif, who was slowly recovering, grew pathetically fond of his rescuer. The children were devoted to her, and she to them. She learnt to love Gladys very much, and from

her she learnt a good deal which helped her to understand Donovan's past life. Then, too, it was the first time in her life that she had ever been in a house where there were little children, and probably Ralph and Dolly did more for her than countless sermons or whole libraries of theology could have done.

Above all, there was Donovan, and the friendship of such a man was a thing which made life a sort of wordless thanksgiving. At times even in those she loved best, even in her father or Charles Osmond, she was conscious of something which jarred a little; but so perfect was her sympathy with Donovan, so closely and strangely were their lives and characters linked together, that never once was the restfulness of perfect harmony broken—Nature and circumstance had, as it were, tuned them to each other. He could understand, as no one else could understand, the reversal of thought and feeling which she had passed through during the last few months. He could understand the perplexities of her present position, suddenly confronted with the world of wealth and fashion and conventional religion, and fresh from a

circle where, whatever the errors held and promulgated, the life was so desperately earnest, often so nobly self-denying. He knew that Mr. Fane-Smith, good man as he was, must have been about the severest of trials to a new-born faith. He understood how Mr. Cuthbert's malice would tend to re-awaken the harsh class judgment against which, as a Christian, Erica was bound to struggle. He could fully realise the irritated, ruffled state she was in—she was overdone, and wanted perfect rest and quiet, perfect love and sympathy. He and his wife gave her all these, took her not only to their house, but right into their home, and how to do this no one knew so well as Donovan, perhaps because he had once been in much the same position himself. It was his most leisure month, the time he always devoted to home and wife and children, so that Erica saw a great deal of him. He seemed to her the ideal head of an ideal yet real home. It was one of those homes—and thank God there are such!—where belief in the Unseen reacts upon the life in the seen, making it so beautiful, so loveable, that, when you go out once more into the ordinary world, you go

with a widened heart, and the realisation that the Kingdom of Heaven of which Christ spoke does indeed begin upon earth.

It is strange, in tracing the growth of spontaneous love, to notice how independent it is of time. Love annihilates time—with love, as with God, time is not. Like the miracles, it brings into use the æonial measurement in which 'one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.' A week, even a few hours, may give us love and knowledge and mutual sympathy with one which the intercourse of many years fails to give with another.

The week at Oakdene was one which all her life long Erica looked back to with the loving remembrance which can gild and beautify the most sorrowful of lives. It is surely a mistake to think that the memory of past delights makes present pain sharper. If not, why do we all so universally strive to make the lives of children happy? Is it not because we know that happiness in the present will give a sort of reflected happiness even in the saddest future? Is it not because we know how in life's bitterest moments, its most barren and desolate paths,

we feel a warmth about our heart, a smile upon our lips, when we remember the old home days with their eager, childish interests and hopes, their vividly recollected pleasures, their sheltered luxuriance of fatherly and motherly love? For how many thousands did the poet speak when he wrote—

> 'The thought of our past years in me doth breed
> Perpetual benediction.'

A benediction which outlives the cares and troubles of later life—which we may carry with us to our dying day, and find perfected indeed in that Unseen, where

> 'All we have willed, or hoped, or dreamed of good shall exist,
> Not its semblance, but itself.'

There was only one bit of annoyance during the whole time; it was on the Sunday, the day before Erica was to go back to Greyshot. Gladys was not very well and stayed at home, but Donovan and Erica went to church with the children, starting rather early that they might enjoy the lovely autumn morning, and also that they might put the weekly wreaths on two graves in the little churchyard. Donovan himself put the flowers upon the first, Ralph

and Dolly talking softly together about 'little auntie Dot,' then running off hand-in-hand to make the 'captain's glave plitty,' as Dolly expressed it. Erica, following them, glanced at the plain white headstone and read the name, 'John Frewin, some time captain of the *Metora*.'

Then they went together into the little country church, and all at once a shadow fell on her heart; for, as they entered at the west end, the clergy and the choristers entered the chancel, and she saw that Mr. Cuthbert was to take the service. The rector was taking his holiday, and had enlisted help from Greyshot.

Happily no man has it in his power to mar the Church of England service, but by-and-by came the sermon. Now Mr. Cuthbert cordially detested Donovan, he made no secret of it. He opposed and thwarted him on every possible occasion, and it is to be feared that personal malice had something to do with his choice of a subject for that morning's sermon.

He had brought over to Oakdene a discourse on the eternity of punishment. Perhaps he honestly believed that people could be frightened to Heaven, at any rate he preached a

most ghastly sermon, and, what was worse, preached it with vindictive energy. The poor, mangled, much-distorted text about the tree lying as it falls was brought to the fore once again, and, instead of bearing reference to universal charity and almsgiving as it was intended to do, was ruthlessly torn from its context and turned into a parable about the state of the soul at death. The words 'damned' and 'damnation,' with all their falsely theologised significance, rang through the little church and made people shudder, though all the time the speaker knew well enough that there were no such words in the New Testament. Had he been there himself to see, he could not have described his material hell more graphically. Presently, leaning right over the pulpit, his eyes fixed on the manor pew just beneath him, he asked, in thundering tones,—'My brethren, have you ever realised what the word LOST means?' Then came a long catalogue of those who in Mr. Cuthbert's opinion would undoubtedly be 'lost,' in which of course all Erica's friends and relatives were unhesitatingly placed.

Now to hear what we sincerely believe to

be error crammed down the throats of a congregation is at all times a great trial; but, when our nearest and dearest are remorselessly thrust down to the nethermost hell, impatience is apt to turn to wrath. Erica thought of her gentle, loving, unselfish mother, and though nothing could alter her conviction that long ere now she had learnt the truths hidden from her in life, yet she could not listen to Mr. Cuthbert's horrible words without indignant emotion. A movement from Donovan recalled her. Little Dorothy was on his knee fast asleep; he quietly reached out his hand, took up Erica's prayer-book, which was nearest to him, and wrote a few words on the fly-leaf, handing the book to her. She read them. 'Definition of LOST: not found yet.' Then the anger and grief and pain died away, and, though the preacher still thundered overhead, God's truth stole into Erica's heart once more by means of one of his earliest consecrated preachers—a little child. Once more Dolly and her father were to her a parable; and presently, glancing away through the sunny south window, her eye fell upon a small marble tablet

just below it that she had not before noticed, and this furnished her with thoughts which outlasted the sermon.

At the top was a medallion, the profile of the same fine, soldierly-looking man whose portrait hung in Donovan's study, and which was so wonderfully like both himself and little Ralph. Beneath was the following inscription :

In loving Memory of
RALPH FARRANT,
Who died at Porthkerran, Cornwall, May 3, 18—,
Aged 45.

'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning.'

The date was sixteen years back, but the tablet was comparatively new, and could not have been up more than six years at the outside. Erica was able partly to understand why Donovan had chosen for it that particular text, and nothing could more effectually have counteracted Mr. Cuthbert's sermon than the thoughts which it awoke in her.

Nevertheless, she did not quite get over the ruffled feeling, which was now in a great measure physical, and it was with a sense of

relief that she found herself again in the open air, in the warmth, and sunshine, and gladness of the September day. Donovan did not say a word. They passed through the little churchyard, and walked slowly up the winding lane; the children, who had stopped to gather a fine cluster of blackberries, were close behind them. In the silence, every word of their talk could be distinctly heard.

'I don't like God!' exclaimed Ralph, abruptly.

'Oh, you naughty!' exclaimed Dolly, much shocked.

'No, it isn't naughty. I don't think He's good. Why, do you think father would let us be shut up in a horrid place for always and always? Course he wouldn't. I 'spects, if we'd got to go, he'd come too.'

Donovan and Erica looked at each other. Donovan turned round, and held out his hand, at which both children rushed.

'Ralph,' he said, 'if anyone told you that I might some day leave off loving you, leave off being your father—what would you do?'

'I'd knock them down!' said Ralph, clenching his small fist.

Donovan laughed a little, but did not then attempt to prove the questionable wisdom of such a proceeding.

'Why would you feel inclined to knock them down?' he asked.

'Because it would be a wicked lie!' cried Ralph. 'Because I know you never could, father.'

'You are quite right. Of course I never could. You would never believe anyone who told you that I could, because you would know it was impossible. But just now you believed what some one said about God, though you wouldn't have believed it of me. Never believe anything which contradicts "Our Father." It will be our Father punishing us now and hereafter, and you may be sure that He will do the best possible for all His children. You are quite sure that I should only punish you to do you good, and how much more sure may you be that God, who loves you so much more, will do the same, and will never give you up.'

Ralph looked hard at his bunch of blackberries, and was silent. Many thoughts were working in his childish brain. Presently he said, meditatively,

'He did shout it out so loud and horrid! I s'pose he had forgotten about "Our Father." But, you see, Dolly, it was all a mistake. Come along! let's race down the drive.'

Off they ran. Erica fancied that Donovan watched them rather sadly.

'I thought Ralph was listening in church,' she said. 'Fancy a child of his age thinking it all out like that!'

'Children think much more than people imagine,' said Donovan. 'And a child invariably carries out a doctrine to its logical conclusion. 'Tis wonderful the fine sense of justice which you always find in them!'

'Ralph inherits that from you, I should think. How exactly like you he is, specially when he is puzzling out some question in his own mind.'

A strange shadow passed over Donovan's face. He was silent for a moment.

''Tis hard to be brave for one's own child,' he said at last. 'I confess that the thought that Ralph may have to live through what I have lived through is almost unendurable to me.'

'How vexed you must have been that he heard to-day's sermon,' said Erica.

'Not now,' he replied. 'He has heard and taken in the other side, and has instinctively recognised the truth. If I had had some one to say as much to me when I was his age, it might have saved me twenty years of atheism.'

'It is not only children who are repulsed by this,' said Erica. 'Or learned men like James Mill. I know well enough that hundreds of my father's followers were driven away from Christianity merely by having this view constantly put before them. How were they to know that half the words about it were mistranslations? How were they to study when they were hard at work from week's end to week's end? It seems to me downright wicked of scholars and learned men to keep their light hidden away under a bushel, and then pretend that they fear the "people" are not ready for it.'

'As though God's truth needed bolstering up with error!' exclaimed Donovan. 'As though to believe a hideous lie could ever be right or helpful! There's a vast amount of Jesuitry among well-meaning Protestants.'

'And always will be, I should think,' said Erica. 'As long as people will think of possi-

ble consequences, instead of the absolutely true. But I could forgive them all, if their idea of the danger of telling the people were founded on real study of the people. But is it? How many of the conservers of half truths, who talk so loudly about the effect on the masses, have personally known the men who go to make up the masses?'

'Yes, you are right,' said Donovan. 'As a rule, I fancy the educated classes know less about the working classes than they do about the heathen, and, I am afraid, care less about them. You have an immense advantage there both as a writer and a worker, for I suppose you really have been brought into contact with them.'

'Yes,' said Erica, 'all my life. How I should like to confront Mr. Cuthbert with a man like Hazeldine, or with dozens of others whom I could name!'

'Why?' asked Donovan.

'Because no one could really know such men without learning where the present systems want mending. If Hazeldine could be shut into Mr. Cuthbert's study for a few hours, and

induced to tell the story of his life, I believe he would have the effect of the ancient mariner on the wedding guest. Only, the worst of it is, I'm afraid the very look of Mr. Cuthbert would quite shut him up.'

'Tell me about him,' said Donovan.

'It is nothing at second hand,' said Erica. 'He is a shoemaker, as grand-looking a fellow as you ever saw, fond of reading, and very thoughtful, and with more quiet common-sense than almost anyone I ever met. He had been brought up to believe in verbal inspiration—that had been thoroughly crammed down his throat; but no one had attempted to touch upon the contradictions, the thousand and one difficulties which of course he found directly he began to study the Bible. So he puzzled and puzzled, and got more and more dissatisfied, and never in church heard anything which explained his difficulties. At last one day in his workshop a man lent him a number of the *Idol-Breaker,* and in it was a paper by my father on the Atonement. It came to him like a great light in his darkness; he says he shall never forget the sudden conviction that the man who

wrote that article understood every one of his difficulties, and would be able to clear them right away. The next Sunday he went to hear my father lecture. I believe it would make the veriest flint cry to hear his account of it, to see the look of reverent love that comes over his face when he says, "And there I found Mr. Raeburn ready to answer all my difficulties, not holding one at arm's length and talking big and patronising for all he was so clever, but just like a mate." That man would die for my father any day—hundreds of them would.'

'I can well believe it,' said Donovan. Then, after a pause, he added, 'To induce Christians to take a fair, unprejudiced look at true secularism, and to induce secularists to take a fair, unprejudiced view of true Christ-following, seems to me to be the great need of to-day.'

'If one could!' said Erica, with a long-drawn sigh.

'If anyone can, you can,' he replied.

She looked up at him quickly, awed by the earnestness of his tone. Was she—a young girl, conscious of so many faults and failings, conscious of being at the very threshold herself

—to dare even to attempt such a task? Yet was it a question of daring to attempt? Was it not rather the bit of work mapped out for her, to undertake, perhaps to fail in, but still bravely to attempt? Her heart throbbed with eager yearning as the vision rose before her. What was mere personal pain? what was injustice? what was misunderstanding? Why, in such a cause she could endure anything!

'I would die to help on that!' she said, in a low voice.

'Will you live for it?' asked Donovan, with his rare, beautiful smile. 'Live, and do something more than endure the Lady Carolines and Mr. Cuthberts?'

Few things are more inspiriting than the realisation that we are called to some special work which will need our highest faculties, our untiring exertions—which will demand all that is good in us, and will make growth in good imperative. With the peacefulness of that country Sunday was interwoven a delicious perception that hard, beautiful work lay beyond. Erica wandered about the shady Mountshire woods with Gladys and the children, and

in the cool restfulness, in the stillness and beauty, got a firm hold of her lofty ideal, and rose above the petty vexations and small frictions which had been spoiling her life at Greyshot.

The manor grounds were always thrown open to the public on Sunday, and a band in connection with one of the temperance societies played on the lawn. Donovan had been much persecuted by the Sabbatarians for sanctioning this; but, though sorry to offend anyone, he could not allow what he considered mistaken scruples to interfere with such a boon to the public. Crowds of working men and women came each week away from their densely-packed homes into the pure country; the place was for the time given up to them, and they soon learnt to love it, to look upon it as a property in which they had a real and recognised share.

Squire Ward, who owned the neighbouring estate, grumbled a good deal at the intrusion of what he called the 'rabble' into quiet Oakdene.

'That's the worst of such men as Farrant,' he used to say. 'They begin by rushing to one

extreme, and end by rushing to the other. Such a want of steady conservative balance! He's a good man; but, poor fellow, he'll never be like other people, never!'

Mrs. Ward was almost inclined to think that he had been less obnoxious in the old times. As a professed atheist, he could be shunned and ignored, but his uncomfortably practical Christianity had a way of shaking up the sleepy neighbourhood, and the neighbourhood did not at all like being shaken!

CHAPTER XIII.

GREYSHOT AGAIN.

To what purpose do you profess to believe in the unity of the human race, which is the necessary consequence of the unity of God, if you do not strive to verify it by destroying the arbitrary divisions and enmities that still separate the different tribes of humanity? Why do we talk of fraternity while we allow any of our brethren to be trampled on, degraded, or despised? The earth is our workshop. We may not curse it, we are bound to sanctify it . . . We must strive to make of humanity one single family.—MAZZINI.

ERICA'S appearance at Lady Caroline's dinner-party had caused a sort of storm in a tea-cup; the small world of Greyshot was in a state of ferment, and poor Mrs. Fane-Smith suffered a good deal from the consciousness that she and her family were the subject of all the gossip of the place. Her little expedients had failed, and she began to reflect ruefully that perfect sincerity, plain honesty, would have been the best policy, after all. By the time that a week had passed, however, censure and harsh comments

began to give place to curiosity, and the result of this was that on Monday, which was Mrs. Fane-Smith's 'at home' day, Greyshot found it convenient to call in large numbers.

Erica, returning from Oakdene in the afternoon, found her work awaiting her. Her heart beat rather quickly when, on entering the drawing-room, she found it full of visitors: she half-smiled to herself to find such an opportunity of beginning Donovan's work. And very bravely she set about it. Those who had come from curiosity not unmixed with malice were won in spite of themselves; even Mr. Cuthbert, who bore down upon her with the full intention of making her uncomfortable, found himself checkmated as effectually as at Lady Caroline's dinner-table, though in a very different way.

'I think I saw you in church yesterday morning?' he remarked, by way of introducing a discordant subject.

'Yes,' replied Erica, 'I have been staying at Oakdene Manor, and had a most delicious time.'

'Sharing Mr. Farrant's philanthropic labours?' asked Mr. Cuthbert, with his unpleasant smile.

She laughed.

'No; I have been thoroughly lazy, and September is their holiday month, too. You would have been amused to see us the other evening all hard at work making paper frogs like so many children.'

'Paper frogs!' said Mr. Cuthbert, with an intonation that suggested sarcasm.

'Yes; have you ever seen them?' asked Erica. 'I don't think many people know how to make them. Feltrino taught me when I was a little girl—I'll show you, if you like.'

'Did you ever meet Feltrino?' asked Lady Caroline.

She knew very little of the Italian patriot. In his lifetime he had been despised and rejected, but he was now dead; his biography—a well-written one—was in all the circulating libraries, and even those who were far from agreeing with his political views, had learnt something of the nobility of his character. So there was both surprise and envy in Lady Caroline's tone; she had a weakness for celebrities.

'I saw him once when I was seven years old,' said Erica. 'He knew my father, and one day we were overtaken by a tremendous

shower, and happened to meet Feltrino, who made us come into his rooms and wait till it was over. And while they talked Italian politics I sat and watched him. He had the most wonderful eyes I ever saw, and presently, looking up and seeing me, he laughed and took me on his knee, saying that politics must not spoil my holiday, and that he would show me how to make Japanese frogs. Once, when he was imprisoned, and was hardly allowed to have any books, the making of these frogs kept him from going mad, he said.'

While she spoke she had been deftly folding a sheet of paper, and several people were watching curiously. Before very long the frog was completed, and the imitation proved so clever that there was an unanimous chorus of approval and admiration. Everyone wanted to learn how to make them; the Feltrino frogs became the topic of the afternoon, and Erica fairly conquered the malicious tongues. She was superintending Lady Caroline's first attempt at a frog, when a familiar name made her look up.

'Mrs. Cunningham—Mr. Leslie Cunningham.'

'I thought you were in Switzerland!' she exclaimed, as he crossed the room and shook hands with her.

'I never got further than Paris,' he said, smiling. 'My brother has gone instead, and I am going to follow your example and study the beauties of English scenery.'

Perhaps Greyshot opinion was more conciliated by the long talk with Mr. Leslie Cunningham, M.P., than even by the Feltrino frogs. To have Luke Raeburn's daughter suddenly thrust into the midst of their select society at Lady Caroline's dinner was one thing—they had one and all shunned her. But when she proved to be, after all, clever, and fascinating, and original, when they knew that she had sat on Feltrino's knee as a little child, above all, when they saw that Leslie Cunningham was talking to her with mingled friendliness and deference, they veered round. Politically, they hated Sir Michael Cunningham, but in society they were pleased enough to meet him, and in Greyshot, naturally enough, his son was a 'lion.' Greyshot made much of him during his stay at Blachingbury, and he found it very

convenient just then to be made much of.

Hardly a day of that week passed in which he did not in some way meet Erica. He met her in the park with her aunt; he sat next to her at an evening concert; he went to the theatre and watched her all through 'Hamlet,' and came to the Fane-Smith's box between the acts. Yet, desperately as he was in love, he could not delude himself with the belief that she cared for him. She was always bright, talkative, frank, even friendly, but that was all. Yet her unlikeness to the monotonously same girls, whom he was in the habit of meeting, fascinated him more and more each day. She was to go back to town on the Monday; on Friday it so happened that she met Leslie Cunningham at a great flower-show, and with perfect unconsciousness piqued him almost beyond endurance. Now at last he hoped to make her understand his admiration. They discussed 'Hamlet,' and he had just brought the conversation adroitly round to the love-scene in the third act, when Erica suddenly dashed his hopes to the ground.

'Oh, how lovely!' she exclaimed, pausing

before a beautiful exotic. 'Surely that must be an orchid?'

And the reluctant Leslie found the conversation drifting round to botany, about which he knew little and cared less. Once more his hopes were raised only to be frustrated. He was sitting beside Mrs. Fane-Smith and Erica, and had managed to stem the tide of the botany. The band was playing. Erica, half listening to the music and half attending to his talk, looked dreamily peaceful; surely now was the time! But all at once the clear golden eyes looked up with their perfectly wide-awake interest, and she exclaimed,

'I do wish the Farrants would come! they certainly meant to be here. I can't make it out.'

Leslie patiently talked about the member for Greyshot; but, just when he hoped he was quit of the subject, Erica gave an exclamation of such unfeigned delight that a consuming envy took possession of him.

'Oh, there he is! and Ralph and Dolly too!'

And in a moment the Oakdene party had joined them, and Leslie saw that his chances for that day were over. Before long he had

made his escape, leaving the grounds not moodily, but with the light of a new and eager determination in his eye.

Erica, returning from the flower-show late in the afternoon, found a note awaiting her, and opened it unconcernedly enough on her way up to her room. But the first glance at it brought a glow of colour to her face and a nameless fear to her heart. She ran on quickly, locked her door, and by the ruddy firelight read in a sort of dumb dismay her first offer of marriage. This then was the meaning of it all. This was the cause of his hurried return to England; this had brought her the long talks which had been so pleasant, yes, strangely unaccountably pleasant. Yet, for all that, she knew well enough that she had nothing to give in return for the love revealed in every word of the letter. She liked him, liked to talk to him, thought him clever and interesting, but that was all. His wife! Oh, no! impossible! That could never be! And then, as usual, even in the midst of her strange sense of discomfort and perplexity, there came a flash of humour which made her laugh noiselessly in the

dim light. 'Tom would call me Mrs. Slybacon!'

But a second reading of the letter made her look grave. She was very much puzzled to know how to answer it; how, in refusing, to give him least pain. There was nothing else to hesitate about, of her own mind she was quite sure. There was only an hour till post time. She must write at once, and she must write in a way which could not be mistaken. There was not a grain of coquetry about Erica. After some thought she wrote the following lines:

'DEAR MR. CUNNINGHAM,

'Your letter surprised me very much and pained me, too, because in replying I fear I must give you pain. I thank you for the honour you have done me, but I can never be your wife. Even if I could return your love, which I cannot, it could never be right. People are so prejudiced that the connection of our names might greatly injure your public work, and, besides, you could not live in the circle in which I live, and nothing could ever make it right for me to leave my own people.

I cannot write as I should like to—I cannot say what I would, or thank you as I would—but please understand me, and

'Believe me, yours very sincerely,

'ERICA RAEBURN.'

Strangely enough the writing of that letter, the realisation of the impossibility of accepting Leslie Cunnningham's offer, opened out to Erica a new region, started her upon a new stage of her life-progress. In spite of her trouble at the thought of the pain she must give, there was an indefinable sense that life and love meant much more than she had hitherto dreamed of; and, though for the next few days she was a little grave and silent, there rang in her ears the refrain,

'Oh, life, oh, beyond,
Thou art strange, thou art sweet.'

She was not sorry that her visit was drawing to a close, although the last week had gone much more smoothly. Her vigorous nature began to long to return to the working-day world, and though she could very honestly thank Mr. Fane-Smith for his kindness, she

turned her back on his house with unmixed satisfaction.

'And you cannot change your mind as to my suggestion?' he asked, sending off one parting arrow.

'I cannot,' said Erica, firmly, 'he is my father.'

'You must of course make your own choice,' he said, with a sigh. 'But you are sadly wrong, sadly wrong! In my opinion your father is——'

'Forgive me for interrupting you,' said Erica, 'but by your own showing you have no right to have any opinion whatever about my father. Until you have either learnt to know him personally, heard him speak, or fairly and carefully studied his writings, you have no grounds to form an opinion upon.'

'But the current opinion is——'

'The current opinion is no more an opinion than yours! It is the view of most bitter opponents. And, candidly, *would* you accept the current opinion held of any prominent statesman by his adversaries? Why, the best men living are represented as fiends in human shape by their enemies! And if this is so in

political matters, how much more in such a case as my father's.'

Mr. Fane-Smith, who was a well-meaning though narrow man, sighed again; it was always very painful to him to listen to views which did not coincide with his own.

'Well,' he said, at length, 'there is, after all, the hope that you may convert him.'

'I hope you don't want me to turn into one of those hateful little prigs, who go about lamenting over their unregenerate parents,' said Erica, naughtily. Then, softening down, she added, 'I think I know what you mean—perhaps I was wrong to speak like that, only somehow, knowing what my father is, it does grate so to put it in that way. But don't think I would not give my life for him to come to the light here and now,—for I would!—I would!'

She clasped her hands tightly together, and turned quickly away.

Mr. Fane-Smith was touched.

'Well, my dear,' he said. 'You may be right, after all, and I may be wrong. All my anxiety is only for your ultimate good.'

The train was on the point of starting, he

gave her a warm handshake, and in spite of all that jarred in their respective natures, Erica ended by liking him the best of her new relations.

CHAPTER XIV.

SLANDER LEAVES A SLUR.

For slander lives upon succession,
For ever housed, where it once gets possession.
Comedy of Errors.

Not out of malice, but mere zeal,
Because he was an infidel.
Hudibras.

'BLESSED old London, how delightful it is to come back to it!' exclaimed Erica, as she and Tom drove home from Paddington on the afternoon of her return from Greyshot. 'Tell the man not to go through the back streets, there's a good boy! Ah, he's doing it of his own accord! Why, the park trees are much browner than the Mountshire ones!'

'We have been prophesying all manner of evil about your coming back,' said Tom, looking her over critically from head to foot. 'I

believe mother thought you would never come —that the good Christians down at Greyshot having caught you would keep you, and even the chieftain was the least bit in the world uneasy.'

'Nonsense,' said Erica, laughing, 'he knows better!'

'But they did want to keep you?'

'Yes.'

'How did you get out of it?'

'Said, "Much obliged to you, but I'd rather not." Enacted Mrs. Micawber, you know, "I never will, no, I never will leave Mr. Micawber."'

'Mr. Fane-Smith must be a brute ever to have proposed such a thing!'

'Oh, no! not at all! Within certain limits he is a kind-hearted man, only he is one of those who believe in that hateful saying, "Men without the knowledge of God are cattle." And, believing that, would treat atheists as I should be sorry to treat Friskarina.'

'And what is the world of Greyshot like?'

'It is very lukewarm about public questions, and very boiling hot about its own private

affairs,' said Erica. 'But I have learnt now how people in society can go on contentedly living their easy lives in the midst of such ignorance and misery. They never investigate, and when any painful instance is alluded to, they say, "Oh! but it *can't* be true!" The other day they were speaking of Kingsley's pamphlet, "Cheap clothes and nasty," and one lady said that was quite an evil of the past, that the difficulty now-a-days was to get things at reasonable prices. When I told her that women only get twopence for doing all the machine-work of an ulster, and have to provide their machine, cotton, food, light, and fuel, she exclaimed, "Oh, that is incredible! It must be exaggerated! Such things couldn't be now!" When Aunt Isobel heard that I had known cases of men being refused admission to a hospital supported by public subscriptions, on the ground of their atheism, she said it was impossible. And as to physical ill-treatment, or, in fact, any injustice having ever been shown by Christian to atheist, she would not hear of it. It was always "My dear, the atmosphere in which you have lived has distorted your vision," or, "You have been told,

my dear, that these things were so!" To tell her that they were facts which could be verified was not the smallest good, for she wouldn't so much as touch any publication connected with secularism.'

'None are so blind as those who will not see,' said Tom. 'They will go on in this way till some great national crisis, some crash which they can't ignore, wakes them up from their comfortable state. "It can't be true," is no doubt a capital narcotic.'

'Father is at home, I suppose? How do you think he is?'

'Oh, very well, but fearfully busy. The "Miracles" trial will probably come on in November.'

Erica sighed. There was a silence. She looked out rather sadly at the familiar Oxford Street shops.

'You have not come back approving of the Blasphemy Laws, I hope?' said Tom, misinterpreting her sigh.

Her eyes flashed.

'Of course not!' she said, emphatically.

'Mr. Osmond has, as usual, been getting into

hot water for speaking a word on the chieftain's behalf.'

'Did he speak? I am glad of that,' said Erica, brightening. 'I expect Mr. Pogson's conduct will stir up a good many liberal Christians into showing their disapproval of bigotry and injustice. Ah! here is the dear old square! The statue looks ten degrees mouldier than when I left!'

In fact everything looked, as Erica expressed it, 'mouldier!' 'Persecution Alley,' the lodging house, the very chairs and tables seemed to obtrude their shabbiness upon her. Not that she cared in the least; for, however shabby, it was home—the home that she had longed for again and again in the luxury and ease of Greyshot.

Raeburn looked up from a huge law book as she opened the door of his study.

'Why, little son Eric!' he exclaimed. 'You came so quietly that I never heard you. Glad to have you home again, my child! The room looks as if it needed you, doesn't it?'

Erica laughed, for the study was indeed in a state of chaos. Books were stacked up on the

floor, on the mantelpiece, on the chairs, on the very steps of the book-ladder. The writing table was a sea of papers, periodicals, proofs, and manuscripts, upon which there floated with much difficulty Raeburn's writing-desk and the book he was reading, some slight depression in the surrounding mass of papers showing where his elbows had been.

'About equal to Teufelsdröch's room, isn't it?' he said, smiling. '"Everything united in a common element of dust." But, really, after the first terrible day of your absence, when I wasted at least an hour in hunting for things which the tidy domestic had carefully hidden, I could stand it no longer, and gave orders that no one was to bring brush or duster or spirit of tidiness within the place.'

'We really must try to get you a larger room,' said Erica, looking round. 'How little and poky everything looks.'

'Has Greyshot made you discontented?'

'Only for you,' she replied, laughing. 'I was thinking of Mr. Fane-Smith's great study; it seems such a pity that five foot three, with few books and nothing to do, should have all that

space, and six foot four, with much work and many books, be cramped up in this little room.'

'What would you say to a move?'

'It will be such an expensive year, and there's that dreadful Mr. Pogson always in the background.'

'But if a house were given to us? Where's Tom? I've a letter here which concerns you both. Do either of you remember anything about an old Mr. Woodward who lived at 16, Guilford Square?'

'Why, yes! Don't you remember, Tom? The old gentleman whose green-house we smashed.'

'Rather!' said Tom. 'I've the marks of the beastly thing now.'

'What was it? Let me hear the story?' said Raeburn, leaning back in his chair with a look of amusement flickering about his rather stern face.

'Why, father, it was years ago; you were on your first tour in America. I must have been about twelve, and Tom fourteen. We had only just settled in here, you know; and one unlucky Saturday we were playing in the garden at "King of the Castle."'

'What's that?' asked Raeburn.

'Why, Tom was king, and I was the Republican Army; and Tom was standing on the top of the wall trying to push me down. He had to sing,

> "I'm the king of the castle!
> Get down, you dirty rascal!"

And somehow—I don't know how it was—instead of climbing up, I pushed him backwards by mistake, and he went down with an awful crash into the next garden. We knew it was the garden belonging to No. 16—quite a large one it is—for the hospital hasn't any. And when at last I managed to scramble on to the wall, there was Tom, head downwards, with his feet sticking up through the roof of a greenhouse, and the rest of him all among the flower-pots.'

Raeburn laughed heartily.

'There was a brute of a cactus jammed against my face too,' said Tom. 'How I ever got out alive was a marvel!'

'Well, what happened?' asked Raeburn.

'Why, we went round to tell the No. 16 people. Tom waited outside, because he was

so frightfully cut about, and I went in, and saw an old, old man—a sort of Methusaleh—who would ask my name, and whether I had anything to do with you.'

'What did you say to him?'

'I can't remember, except that I asked him to let us pay for the glass by instalments, and tried to assure him that Secularists were not in the habit of smashing other people's property. He was a very jolly old man, and of course he wouldn't let us pay for the glass, though he frightened me dreadfully by muttering that he shouldn't wonder if the glass and the honesty combined cost him a pretty penny.'

'Did you ever see him again?'

'Not to speak to, but we always nodded to each other when we passed in the square. I've not seen him for ages. I thought he must be dead.'

'He is dead,' said Raeburn; 'and he has left you three hundred pounds, and he has left me his furnished house, with the sole proviso that I live in it.'

'What a brick!' cried Tom and Erica, in a breath. 'Now fancy, if we hadn't played at "King of the Castle" that day!'

'And if Erica had not been such a zealous little Republican!' said Raeburn, smiling.

'Why, father, the very green-house will belong to you; and such a nice piece of garden! Oh, when can we go and see it, and choose a nice room for your study?'

'I will see Mr. Woodward's executor to-morrow morning,' said Raeburn. 'The sooner we move in the better, for there are rocks ahead.'

'The "we" refers only to you and Erica,' said Aunt Jean, who had joined them. 'Tom and I shall of course stay on here.'

'Oh, no, auntie!' cried Erica, in such genuine dismay that Aunt Jean was touched.

'I don't want you to feel at all bound to have us,' she said. 'Now that the worst of the poverty is over, there is no necessity for clubbing together.'

'And after you had shared all the discomforts with us, you think we should go off in such a dog-in-the-mangerish way as that!' cried Erica. 'Besides, it really was chiefly owing to Tom, who was the one to get hurt into the bargain. If you won't come, I shall'—she

paused to think of a threat terrible enough—'I shall think again about living with the Fane-Smiths.'

This led the conversation back to Greyshot, and they lingered so long round the fire talking, that Raeburn was for once unpunctual, and kept an audience at least ten minutes waiting for him.

No. 16, Guilford Square, proved to be much better inside than a casual passer in the street would have imagined. Outside, it was certainly a grim-looking house, but within it was roomy and comfortable. The lower rooms were wainscotted in a sort of yellowish-brown colour, the upper, wainscotted in olive-green. There was no such thing as a wall-paper in the whole house, and indeed it was hard to imagine, when once inside it, that you were in nineteenth century London at all.

Raeburn, going over it with Erica the following evening, was a little amused to think of himself domiciled in such an old-world house. Mr. Woodward's housekeeper, who was still taking care of the place, assured them that one of the leaden pipes outside bore the date of the

seventeenth century, though the two last figures were so illegible that they might very possibly have stood for 1699.

Erica was delighted with it all, and went on private voyages of discovery, while her father talked to the housekeeper, taking stock of the furniture, imagining how she would re-arrange the rooms, and planning many purchases to be made with her three hundred pounds. She was singing to herself for very lightness of heart when her father called her from below. She ran down again, checking her inclination to sing as she remembered the old housekeeper, who had but recently lost her master.

'I've rather set my affections on this room,' said Raeburn, leading her into what had formerly been the dining-room.

'The very place where I came in fear and trembling to make my confession,' said Erica, laughing. 'This would make a capital study.'

'Yes, the good woman has gone to fetch an inch tape; I want to measure for the bookshelves. How many of my books could I comfortably house in here, do you think?'

'A good many. The room is high, you see;

and those two long, unbroken walls would take several hundred. Ah! here is the measuring tape. Now we can calculate.'

They were hard at work measuring when the door-bell rang, and Tom's voice was heard in the passage asking for Raeburn.

'This way, Tom!' called Erica. 'Come and help us.'

But a laughing reference to the day of their childish disaster died on her lips when she caught sight of him, for she knew that something was wrong. Accustomed all her life to live in the region of storms, she had learnt to a nicety the tokens of rough weather.

'Hazeldine wishes to speak to you,' said Tom, turning to Raeburn. 'I brought him round here to save time.'

'Oh! all right,' said Raeburn, too much absorbed in planning the arrangement of his treasures to notice the unusual graveness of Tom's face. 'Ask him in here. Good evening, Hazeldine. You are the first to see us in our new quarters.'

Hazeldine bore traces of having lived from his childhood a hard but sedentary life. He

was under-sized and narrow-chested. But the face was a very striking one, the forehead finely developed, the features clearly cut, and the bright, dark eyes looking out on the world with an almost defiant honesty, a clearness bordering on hardness.

Raeburn, entirely putting aside for the time his own affairs, and giving to his visitor his whole and undivided attention, saw in an instant that the man was in trouble.

'Out of work again?' he asked. 'Anything gone wrong?'

'No, sir,' replied Hazeldine; 'but I came round to ask if you'd seen this circular letter. 'Twas sent me this morning by a mate of mine who's lately gone to Longstaff, and he says that this Pogson is sowing them broadcast among the hands right through all the workshops in the place, and in all England, too, for aught he knows. I wouldn't so much as touch the dirty thing, only I thought maybe you hadn't heard of it.'

Without a word, Raeburn held out his hand for the printed letter. Erica, standing at a little distance, watched the faces of the three

men—Tom, grave, yet somewhat flushed; Hazeldine, with a scornful glitter in his dark eyes; her father? Last of all she looked at him, and looking, learnt the full gravity of this new trouble. For, as he read, Raeburn grew white, with the marble whiteness which means that intense anger has interfered with the action of the heart. As he hastily perused the lines, his eyes seemed to flash fire; the hand which still held the measuring-tape was clenched so tightly that the knuckles looked like polished ivory.

Erica could not ask what was the matter, but she came close to him. When he had finished reading, the first thing his eye fell upon was her face turned up to his with a mute appeal which, in spite of the anxiety in it, made her look almost like a child. He shrank back as she held out her hand for the letter; it was so foul a libel that it seemed intolerable to him that his own child should so much as read a line of it.

'What is it?' she asked at length, speaking with difficulty.

'A filthy libel circulated by that liar Pogson! A string of lies invented by his own evil brain!

Why should I keep it from you? It is impossible! The poisonous thing is sown broadcast through the land! You are of age—there—read it, and see how vile a Christian can be!'

He was writhing under the insult, and was too furious to measure his words. It was only when he saw Erica's brave lip quiver that he felt with remorse that he had doubled her pain.

She had turned a little away from him, ostensibly to be nearer to the gas, but in reality that he might not see the crimson colour which surged up into her face as she read. Mr. Pogson was as unscrupulous as fanatics invariably are. With a view of warning the public and inducing them to help him in crushing the false doctrine he abhorred, he had tried to stimulate them by publishing a sketch of Raeburn's personal character and life, drawn chiefly from his imagination, or from distorted and misquoted anecdotes which had for years been bandied about among his opponents, losing nothing in the process. Hatred of the man Luke Raeburn was his own great stimulus, and we are apt to judge others by ourselves. The publication of this letter really seemed to him likely to do

great good, and the evil passions of hatred and bigotry had so inflamed his mind, that it was perfectly easy for him to persuade himself that the statements were true. Indeed, he only followed with the multitude to do evil in this instance, for not one in a thousand took the trouble to verify their facts, or even their quotations, when speaking of, or quoting, Raeburn. The libel, to put it briefly, represented Raeburn as a man who had broken every one of the ten commandments.

Erica read steadily on, though every pulse in her beat at double time. It was long before she finished it, for a threefold chorus was going on in her brain—Mr. Pogson's libellous charges; the talk between her father and Hazeldine which revealed all too plainly the harm already done to the cause of Christianity by this one unscrupulous man; and her own almost despairing cry to the Unseen—

'Oh, Father! how is he ever to learn to know Thee, when such things as these are done in Thy name!'

That little sheet of paper had fallen among them like a thunder-bolt.

'I have passed over a great deal,' Raeburn was saying when Erica looked up once more. 'But I shall not pass over this! Pogson shall pay dearly for it. Many thanks, Hazeldine, for bringing me word; I shall take steps about it at once.'

He left the room quickly, and in another minute they heard the street door close behind him.

'That means an action for libel,' said Tom, knitting his brows. 'And goodness only knows what fearful work and worry for the chieftain.'

'But good to the cause in the long run!' said Hazeldine. 'And, as for Mr. Raeburn, he only rises the higher the more they try to crush him. He's like the bird that rises out of its own ashes —the phœnix, don't they call it?'

Erica smiled a little at the comparison, but sadly.

'Don't judge Christianity by this one bad specimen,' she said, as she shook hands with Hazeldine.

'How do Christians judge us, Miss Erica,' he replied, sternly.

'Then be more just than you think they are—as generous as you would have them be.'

'It's but a working-day world, miss, and I'm but a working-day man. I can't set up to be generous to them who treat a man as though he was the dirt in the street. And if you will excuse me mentioning it, miss, I could wish that this shameful treatment would show to you what a delusion it is you've taken up of late.'

'Mr. Pogson can hurt me very much, but not so fatally as that,' said Erica, as much to herself as to Hazeldine.

When he had gone she picked up the measure once more, and turned to Tom.

'Help me just to finish this, Tom,' she said. 'We must try to move in as quickly as may be.'

Tom silently took the other end of the tape, and they set to work again; but all the enjoyment in the new house seemed quenched and destroyed by that blast of calumny. They knew only too well that this was but the beginning of troubles.

Raeburn, remembering his hasty speech, called

Erica into the study the moment he heard her return. He was still very pale, and with a curiously rigid look about his face.

'I was right, you see, in my prophecy of rocks ahead,' he exclaimed, throwing down his pen. 'You have come home to a rough time, Eric, and to an over-harassed father.'

'The more harassed the father, the more reason that he should have a child to help him,' said Erica, sitting down on the arm of his chair, and putting back the masses of white hair which hung over his forehead.

'Oh, child,' he said, with a sigh, 'if I can but keep a cool head and a broad heart through the years of struggle before us!'

'Years!' exclaimed Erica, dismayed.

'This affair may drag on almost indefinitely, and a personal strife is apt to be lowering.'

'Yes,' said Erica, musingly, 'to be libelled does set one's back up dreadfully, and to be much praised humbles one to the very dust.'

'What will the Fane-Smiths say to this? Will they believe it of me?'

'I can't tell,' said Erica, hesitatingly.

'"He that's evil deemed is half hanged,"'

said Raeburn, bitterly. 'Never was there a truer saying than that.'

'"Blaw the wind ne'er so fast, it will lown at the last,"' quoted Erica, smiling. 'Equally true, *padre mio*.'

'Yes, dear,' he said, quietly, 'but not in my lifetime. However, we must make the best of it. How about the new house? When can we settle in? I feel a longing for that study with its twenty-two feet of length for pacing.'

'What are your engagements?' she asked, taking up a book from the table. '11th, Newcastle; 12th, Nottingham; 13th and 14th, Plymouth. Let me see, that will bring you home on Monday the 15th, and will leave us three clear days to get things straight; that will do capitally.'

'And you'll be sure to see that the books are carefully moved,' said Raeburn. 'I can't have the markers displaced.'

Erica laughed. Her father had a habit of putting candle-lighters in his books to mark places for references, and the appearance of the book-shelves all bristling with them had long been a family joke, more especially as, if a

candle-lighter happened to be wanted for its proper purpose, there was never one to be found.

'I will pack them myself,' she said.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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